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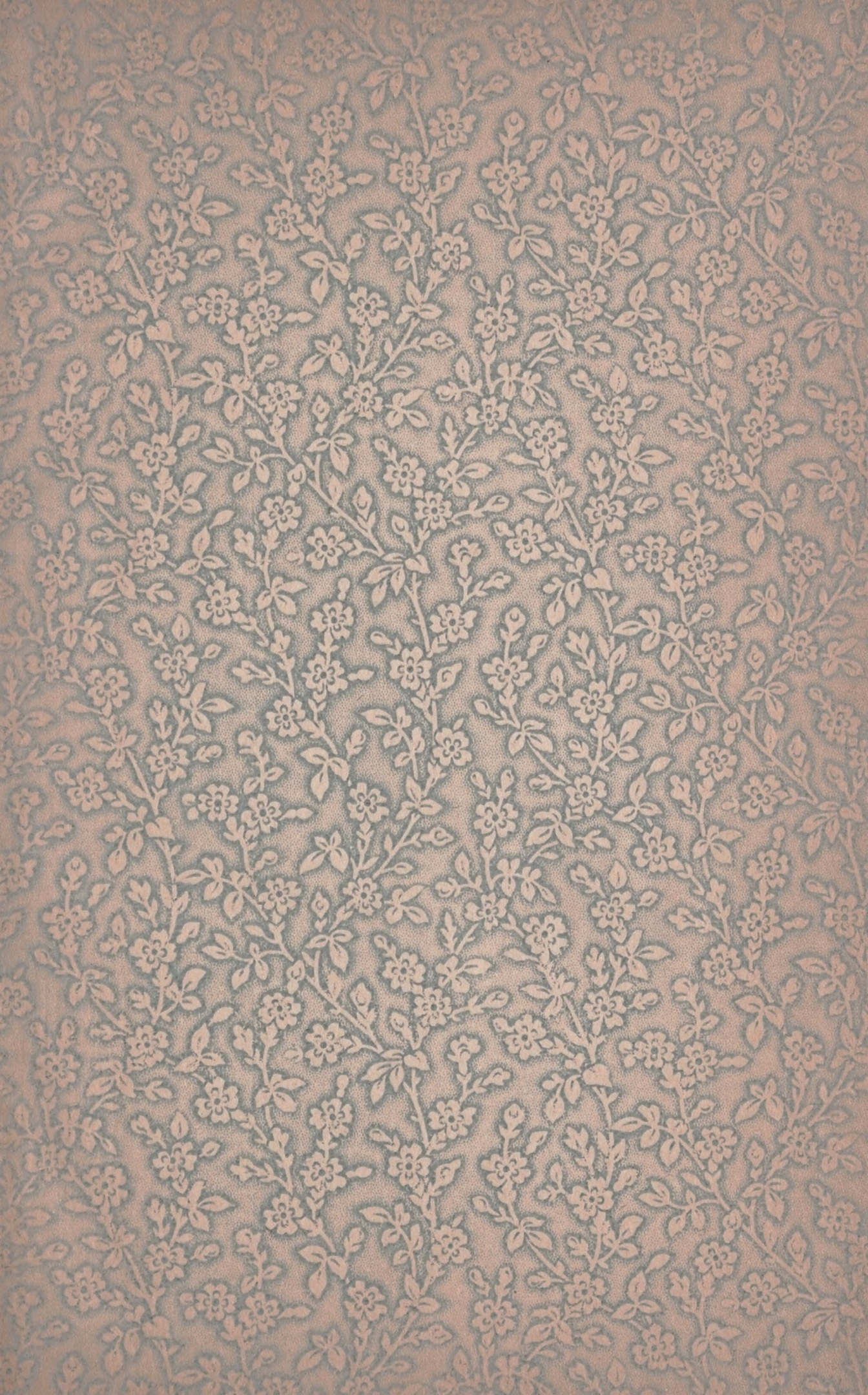
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RENEE'S MARRIAGE

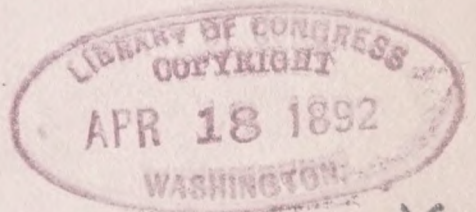
BY

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MARTHE LACHÈSE

From the French

BY

P. P. S.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS.

I. TWO COUSINS,	5
II. OBLIGED TO WAIT,	24
III. ALPHONSE'S AGILITY,	34
IV. PLANS,	. . . . .	43
V. RENÉE,	. . . . .	66
VI. A VISIT,	. . . . .	114
VII. THE MARQUISE'S SOIRÉE,	. . . . .	140
VIII. THE NEXT DAY,	. . . . .	224

RENEE'S MARRIAGE.

CHAPTER I.

TWO COUSINS.

AS the hour of eleven sounded from all the clocks that in a great city seem like the plaintive voices of time rapidly passing away, a young man descended from a travelling carriage, and entered a handsome house the porch of which was surmounted by a large slab of black marble, bearing these words: *Grand Hotel de Bourgogne*. He opened the glass door behind which was a woman seated at a desk, and inquired:

“ M. Gauthier de Montpollin ? ”

“ Number 75, corridor to the right, in the fifth story,” answered the clerk.

“ But is he at home ? ”

“ Yes, Monsieur.”

The young man slowly ascended the staircase, the beautiful marble of which, with its hand-rail

of velvet, and figured carpet, did not diminish the number of its one hundred and twelve steps. He stopped a moment upon the fifth landing to take breath, then turned in the direction indicated, and, at last, rapped at a door the number of which could scarcely be distinguished, so dark was the corridor.

"Come in," said a voice from the depths of the apartment.

The visitor opened the door, and advanced joyfully, but stopped short—he saw no one.

A burst of laughter from an alcove on the right, caused him to turn round. From amidst curtains that in the last century might have been blue, a head appeared, and two hands were extended to greet him.

"In bed!" exclaimed the new-comer. "Are you sick?"

"Not the least in the world, my dear fellow, but I had nothing to do. Besides, it is not more than eleven o'clock at latest. I have smoked but four cigars."

"What taste!" it is almost impossible to see here. Well, I am delighted that you have had a safe and pleasant journey. But get up, Alphonse, we can talk better. It really makes me uncomfortable to look at you through the cigar smoke and under the reflection of that green curtain."

"I will," answered Alphonse, yawning. Stir up the fire a little, Xavier, whilst I dress."

Very soon the two young men were seated, side by side before a blazing fire.

"I did not expect to see you in Paris just now," said he whom the traveller called Xavier. "Your last letter led me to believe that you were about to study with a notary."

"Pooh! I really did think myself threatened with that calamity. Scarcely knowing what to set about, I pondered the matter seriously. Said I to myself, in a little town, a notary's practice is always worth a hundred thousand francs. That of M. Malvarais—are you acquainted with M. Malvarais?"

Xavier inclining his head affirmatively, Alphonse continued :

"That of M. Malvarais, it appeared to me, was about the above mentioned sum. Moreover, he is rich, that good man—the death of a relative left him heir to at least eight thousand or ten thousand francs' income. His only daughter is but seventeen, she will not marry for a year or two. Now, said I to myself, in studying with M. Malvarais, I give him the opportunity of becoming thoroughly acquainted with me. Meanwhile, during these years of patience, I dance at all the balls with Mlle. Malvarais, I am very attentive to Madame, I accidentally meet the grandmother

when she goes out leaning upon the arm of some old Jeanneton, and I often beg the pleasure of replacing the latter. I—”

“I understand,” said Xavier, laughing. “In a word, notary’s clerk, dancer, courtier—all these titles, are one day to be lost in that of betrothed.”

“Admirably defined! I marry. My wife receives as her dowry the paternal practice. In a few months, I sell the above mentioned practice.”

“Oh! that would be anything but respectful!”

“The deuce, my good fellow! when Jacob had obtained Rachael’s hand, he didn’t consider himself bound to tend sheep any longer.”

Xavier laughed more heartily than ever.

“Let us unfold our plans in order,” continued Alphonse, delighted to see his friend in such good spirits. “When I shall have realized a hundred thousand francs, I buy a beautiful country seat near a fine hunting ground, and I am a happy man. In winter, I hunt; in summer, I fish; I have a farmer, I build, I tear down—”

“Ah, that is grand!” exclaimed Xavier, throwing himself back in his arm-chair. “He already beholds his estate and himself lord and master! What imagination! But, my dear fellow, as beautifully constructed as your romance may be, I am at a loss to understand how I find

you in Paris on your way to M. Malvarais's office."

Alphonse arose, and regarding Xavier with an air of triumph, exclaimed :

" Ah ! I have you there ; you are off the track this time. I have exposed my ideas concerning Father Malvarais, merely as one does an ordinary garment that he intends changing for one of velvet. I resign to the bourgeoisie, M. Malvarais, his practice, his daughter, everything."

" And what replaces them ?"

" A beautiful young girl, a dowry of seven hundred thousand francs, an estate in the heart of Touraine !"

" Oh, gracious ! but that is a dream ! Are you speaking seriously ?"

" Quite seriously."

" It is incredible !"

" And why ?" replied Alphonse. " Are you so very much astonished at the thought of my marrying advantageously ?"

" No, no, on the contrary, I am delighted ; but in this world, matters are not always arranged so easily."

" Ah ! well, I shall prove an exception to that rule. In fine, I must tell you how it all came about. You know my mother had an elder sister married to an Austrian general, the Baron de Grenaff."

"Yes, I remember seeing your uncle five or six years ago, at an entertainment given to the Minister of War."

"Yes, he was in Paris, but he did not make our acquaintance. Oh! he was a bear, a miser."

"I believe he is dead."

"Yes, thank God!"

"Oh!"

"Yes, thank God, I say. This ejaculation enters into my story, and should no more be suppressed than the rest of it. Well, to continue, he left my Aunt Aurelie a widow after having held her aloof for thirty years from the world which she loved to distraction. As to the General, he cared for nothing but his books, and devoted his money to works of philanthropy among superannuated soldiers."

"Did you not just say that he was miserly?"

"Yes, as regards any diversion or pleasure it was impossible to get a cent out of him. He allowed my aunt a stipulated sum for her wardrobe, but beyond that sum you could not persuade him to buy her even a pair of gloves. On seeing her embarrassed to pay her debts, he would say harshly, 'So much the worse for you! buying such numbers of dresses, was altogether unnecessary?' Oh! she was very unhappy!"

"Evidently," replied Xavier in a tone of slight

irony. He had been acquainted with an intimate friend of the Baron, and knew the true story of M. de Grénaff's severity and his wife's extravagance.

"Since becoming a widow, she makes her money fly," resumed the nephew, advocating the cause of his happily inspired aunt. "But the old miser left her no great things; however, she has sufficient to travel on."

"Come, let us get to the part that concerns yourself," interrupted Xavier, casting a glance at his watch. "I have but five more minutes to give you."

"I am not straying from my subject. I have told you that my aunt spends her time travelling; and last winter she met at Nice, a Belgian family, consisting of the following members: the father, M. Vangaramenghen, a banker; his wife; a daughter nineteen years of age, by his first wife; and two children by the second Mme. Vangaramenghen, a charming, elegant, thorough woman of the world, with whom my aunt became very intimate. During the six weeks of a winter's trip, they were constantly together, mingling in every amusement, and one not able to do without the other. At this time, the eldest daughter was not with her parents. She had been placed at a convent by a maternal grand-aunt, her godmother; and, as, on the one hand,

she was perfectly satisfied there, whilst on the other, her stepmother was not extremely anxious to take charge of her, she had remained there up to the present time. At last, the father, judging that a daughter nineteen years of age, was old enough to take her place in the world, withdrew her from the convent. My aunt saw her at Vichy. She is very pretty, it appears, and has the elegant manners and bearing of a little duchess. But she has very strong opinions of her own, which clash with those of the stepmother. For instance, at the first breakfast on Friday which she took at home, the presence of two guests, did not prevent her positively refusing to partake of the sumptuously served meats, to the great irritation of Mme. Vangaramenghen, who could overcome her neither by reproaches nor banter. The young girl seemed deeply touched, but remained inflexible. Her conduct was precisely the same, in regard to certain relations, with whom she would have no intercourse, certain opera airs that nothing could induce her to sing,—indeed, concerning many matters upon which she and Madame differed. Mlle. Renée (that was her name) could not be moved an inch. But the important, grave affair, that which turned the beam it appears, took place about eight days ago. The whole family was in the country upon the estate in Touraine, which I have already

mentioned as belonging to the young girl ; when behold, Mme. Vangaramenghen receives an invitation to a magnificent fancy ball where she would have the opportunity of dancing with a Swedish prince. This invitation arrived Friday evening, and the soirée was to take place the following Monday. All in vain would they bestir themselves immediately, to get off Saturday, —it was an impossibility for their apparel must be in readiness ; and to take the afternoon train on Sunday, would make them too late for some of the arrangements, consequently it was decided that they should start Sunday morning, at four o'clock, so as to reach Tours in time for the fastest train. But at this announcement, Mlle. Renée declared most positively that she would never sacrifice a duty of obligation to the pleasure of attending a ball, and that nothing could induce her to quit the château ere hearing Mass. Mme. Vangaramenghen, perceiving her determined resistance, in a most excited manner laid the matter before the father, saying that she had no influence or control over Mlle. Renée, who was only a source of torment and worry to her—in fine, she begged him to decide the question. The young girl it appears did not defend her cause badly ; for the father gave as his decision, that since the wife spoke in the name of pleasure, and the daughter,

of her conscience, he could not sacrifice the latter to the former ; consequently, Mlle. Renée would set out with him either Sunday evening or Monday morning, leaving Mme. Vangaramenghen free to make her own arrangements, and to depart sooner if she so desired. Piqued beyond expression the wife accepted this compromise, and started on her journey before dawn, accompanied by her two children and a maid. M. Vangaramenghen was to follow with the rest of the family. In all their travels heretofore Monsieur had attended to the baggage. I know not how Madame managed hers this time, but it so happened, that whilst she was on her way to Paris, the trunk (just think of it, the trunk containing the toilette for a prince's ball!) was going towards Montpellier."

Here Alphonse was interrupted by Xavier's peals of laughter. The young man laughed until he cried. Nor could Alphonse help laughing.

"You can well imagine the horror of such a mishap,—to have risen eight hours earlier than usual, to have vexed her lord and master (for M. Vangaramenghen was far from being pleased), to have had the fatigue and bother of the trip, all to end in so supremely ridiculous a manner, her missing the opportunity of dancing with His Highness, not to speak of the loss of a dress, costing five thousand or six thousand francs ! So, that when

two days later, M. and Mlle. Vangaramenghen reached Paris, they were overwhelmed with such reproaches, such an outburst of wrath, that Monsieur, comprehending the impossibility of a continuance of this state of affairs, declared that his daughter should be married within six weeks! This was indeed the only practicable means of separating the two women. The future must shape itself in accordance with this decision. The young girl, possessing already seven hundred thousand francs, besides the château, and a prospective fortune nearly as great from a relative whose sole heiress she is, has no need of riches in her suitor. It is necessary only that he be a young man of good family, unsullied reputation, agreeable address, educated—in fine, just what your humble servant believes himself to be. My aunt, who extols me to the skies, because, as she says, I amuse her, instantly seized upon the project of marriage, and heartily entered into their plans, as her friend laid bare the story of these griefs and trials. ‘Oh! exclaimed she, ‘I can manage all this for you; my own nephew is the very person, a delightful young man.’

“ ‘Bravo!’ exclaimed Mme. Vangaramenghen, ‘do telegraph for him for I shall have no peace until I get rid of that little fool.’ My aunt, however, thought it best to speak to the father, before acquainting me with the good news. The

father asked her numberless questions about me. My good aunt's replies were satisfactory, and she also gave him a list of references in case he wished to pursue his inquiries. Everything looks favorable; I have been sent for in haste, I arrived yesterday evening, as you know; to-day, I dine with my aunt; then, we repair to a third house, I do not yet know whose, I see *her*, *she* sees me, we are mutually delighted, of that I am assured in advance, I beholding in her the brilliancy of a million, she saluting in me, freedom; and, in a month, at most, Mlle. Vangaramenghen becomes Mme. Alphonse de Montpollin."

"Gauthier has disappeared," said Xavier sadly.

"No, but we shall put it Gauthier de Montpollin for a while. How, in conscience, my dear fellow, could you wish me to offer a woman of such position so plain and simple a name as Gauthier, one borne by about ten thousand individuals?"

"Others, however found it all-sufficient," gently replied the young man; "it is a name, which in your province, recalls ancient and precious souvenirs. Your mother was content with it, and for twenty-two years mine likewise bore it joyously."

"Yes, but when the opportunity offered of exchanging it for the title of Viscountess de Bois Rougés, she did not slight the chance."

Xavier shook his head. He thought of the

deep and holy love that had united his parents, and Alphonse's words wounded him.

"Vanity and pride had no share in determining my mother's choice," said he.

"Well," replied Alphonse somewhat curtly, "vanity, I hope will aid that of Mlle. Vangaramenghen, and I shall be just as well pleased if it does."

Xavier made no reply. Legal possessor of a title, and one of the oldest names in Poitou, he considered it indelicate to pursue the discussion upon this subject involving his loyalty of character, his love for his mother, and respect for the heritage of honor, accompanying a name long venerated. In a few moments, he said gravely,

"Alphonse, what you have told me about this young girl, gives me great confidence that she will make you happy. She is beautiful and rich, that is all very well; but what strikes me most, is her courageous Christian character. If, as appears most probable at present, she becomes your wife, I hope you will not replace the stepmother in the combat."

"Oh! no, I pledge you my word, no. Do not worry yourself, my dear fellow, on that point. I shall allow her to be as great a Christian and devotee as she wishes. I do not intend to interfere such in matters; she shall have no fault to find with me there. Since I know the disagreeable

side of her character, if I marry her all the same, it is because I do not object to it."

"Ah! do you call that the disagreeable side?"

"Well, it is what causes disagreements; if you wish it, I will turn my phrase thus. I am not complaining of it, on the contrary, I can say, that I should prefer a wife having some spirit."

"So much the better," said Xavier rising. "I will be here to-morrow, about the same time, and no doubt shall find you. If, however, you do go out, remember that I am home at five o'clock. I leave the office at four."

"You go regularly then to the office?"

"Always; it is the exception that I am free to-day."

"My dear fellow, you paralyze me; at your age, and with your fortune, to tie yourself down to such a tiresome life!"

"I do not view it in that light, far from it indeed, I am delighted. If condemned to live in idleness I should die."

"But one ought to know how to occupy himself."

"Use a better expression, and say that one ought to know how to work," replied Xavier smiling, and pressing for a last time the hand the handsome Alphonse had placed in his. "Good-by, then, till to-morrow, either here or at my house. I will announce your arrival to my mother

and sister, but without fixing the day for you to come, so as to leave you free."

"You are right indeed, for I am really obliged to multiply myself as it were. I must go here, go there, to my aunt's, to my patron's, to my betrothed's. Fortunately, I am as nimble and active as formerly when I climbed the walls, and ran after the stage-coach until I overtook it. Do you recollect?"

"Yes, yes, I recollect your exploits," said Xavier, endeavoring to disengage his arm which Alphonse had seized. "But do let me go, Alphonse, I am late now."

"It is too soon, it seems such a little while since you came in. Have you a cab waiting for you."

"Yes, but stop your nonsense, for seriously, I must go, I am expected to meet some one on business."

"Well, go, slave of duty, and think of me this evening."

"I will," said Xavier, as he darted down the stairway. Alphonse re-entered his chamber again, threw himself back again in the arm-chair, lighted a fifth cigar, and placing his feet upon the andirons, remained thus, fixing his eyes upon the light bluish cloud escaping from his pure Havana, and indulging in the following reflections.

"What an original this Xavier is! that he is a

delightful fellow no one can deny, refined and elegant, a gentleman to the very tips of his nails. But it is really incredible that he, only twenty-five years of age, possessor of a handsome title and sixty thousand livres of rent should spend his time scratching paper in an office, or, teaching morality and religion to a crowd of little vagabonds, when he might lead a most delightful life. And then for him to ride in a hack or omnibus like a poor man, when he could have not one only, but three handsome private carriages. Truly does he verify the old adage that there are people of all sorts of tastes in this world !”

Meanwhile, Xavier moving along in a vehicle drawn by a jaded horse, pondered what he had just heard.

“Poor Alphonse !” thought he, “what a weak character! However, he is not bad, though it seems wonderful that with his education he should have escaped so far unscathed. But he is too trifling, his thoughts never straying beyond his apparel, his cigar, the chase. Though destitute of fortune, he has never yet succeeded in settling himself in any business or profession. He has made several attempts to do so, but in vain ; for everything demanded too much exactitude or work beyond his desires, which latter is not astonishing, as his desires are to do nothing. Can he really have found, as he hopes, the long sought for opening?

And even if so, how will he make use of it—but more than all, what will be the fate of this young girl? Poor child! at the very threshold of womanhood, cast into a godless family, as a burden of which they strive to rid themselves, she has courageously kept God's laws. Ah! Providence will not abandon her. If she marries Alphonse, I shall most assuredly assist her by every means in my power in trying to implant a few serious thoughts in his empty mind, and to render his light, trifling heart accessible to a ray of divine love. What sad prospects life holds out for her! Although she would be no longer the subject of incessant contradictions, if married to Alphonse, yet, what must it not be to live in a complete isolation of soul from a husband indifferent to religion, who later, may destroy, one by one, even unintentionally, all the principles of piety with which she, poor woman, will strive to imbue their little ones. And such are the marriages of the present day, often when there is a mother to watch over her child's welfare! how much more deplorable the case when her tenderness is replaced by the mistrust and unkindness of a stranger! Oh! the many sad spectacles this world presents!"

Xavier sighed, and changing the course of his reflections, took from his pocket a package, and from this, a letter, which he read and re-read atten-

tively so as to become thoroughly acquainted with its contents.

“Six thousand francs’ salary! What a godsend this would be to dear Etienne. The old grandmother could then have her coffee, and the sisters their new dresses—it would not be at all extravagant. What a pity they are so proud. My mother would take great pleasure in assisting all of them, young and old, but she dares not mention the subject. Oh! the contrast between Etienne and Alphonse!” Xavier’s eyes again sought the open letter in his hands. Its contents ran thus.

“DEAR XAVIER:

“I address myself to you with all the confidence of a friend. Just now there is a vacancy in one of the public departments which pays a salary of six thousand francs per annum. Far be it from me to complain of my lot, when I say what you already know, that the profession of a barrister, though noble, always leaves the material side of things very uncertain; and in my position, I cannot neglect this important question. I have been told that you are acquainted with the Marquise de Valbret de Manlouars, sister-in-law of the present Minister, and that one word from this holy woman would have great weight in deciding her relative’s choice. May I ask you then to lay my petition before her? I know it could not be in better hands than yours, dear friend. Excuse me for not coming in person to confer with you on the subject. All that prevents

my doing so is a pressing business engagement, demanding much time and labor. Believe me,

Your most devoted friend,

ETIENNE MALHOUET."

"If not too late, we shall gain the battle," murmured Xavier, smiling in anticipation of the happiness with which he could say to his friend, "The field is ours, we have succeeded."

At this moment the horse stopped, and the young man perceived that he had reached his destination, a handsome dwelling in the Rue de Sèvres.

CHAPTER II.

OBLIGED TO WAIT.

XAVIER dismissed the vehicle. Entering the vestibule of this elegant mansion, he ascended the broad, beautiful staircase, and stopping at a door opening on the first floor, he rang the bell. It was opened by an old domestic in livery, who exclaimed :

"Oh! M. Viscount! Madame, the Marquise has not yet returned. That stupid porter knew it, and let you come all the way up."

"No, it was not his fault," answered Xavier decidedly, "I was so sure of finding Mme. de Valbret, that I did not even stop to inquire of him."

"It is M. the Viscount de Bois Rougés," said a voice at the end of the vestibule, and another domestic equally aged and prepossessing in appearance hastily approached.

"Madame went out to remain until three o'clock," said he. "She wrote to Monsieur to defer his proposed visit until that hour. I posted the letter myself yesterday."

"I did not receive it."

"Is it possible? How disagreeable," exclaimed the two old men as Xavier continued:

"Oh! well, the delay is of no great importance; the essential part is that I see Mme. de Valbret to-day. I shall return at three o'clock, and if Madame is not home by that time, I shall wait until she comes."

"Perhaps Monsieur would prefer waiting now," said one of the servants.

"No, as it lacks an hour of the appointed time, I will step out awhile."

A smile of intelligence, flitting over the features of the two old men, proved that Xavier was understood.

"Just as Monsieur wishes," said they, as the young man descended the steps, making with his hands a gesture of adieu and thanks.

"What a good countenance, Pierre!" said one of the old men, closing the door.

"Yes, indeed, and if every one were like him, the world would be much better than it is," replied the other, turning to wipe the silver plates he had just left.

"Don't you think he somewhat resembles our poor, dear M. Jean?"

"Oh! poor, dear M. Jean! M. de Bois Rougés is very fine and elegant looking, to be sure, but he can't equal our dear young master, whom I never think of as dressed in this way, but always as I

last saw him in his white habit, his eyes closed, an angel indeed ! In seeing him thus, one was lifted above earth."

And the old man after passing his hand several times over his eyes, finished by saying ;

" Here, Jacques, wipe this silver, for I cannot do it, I run the risk of tarnishing it."

But Jacques was likewise unable to wipe the silver, the same tears of emotion coursing down the cheeks of both these humble friends, who mourned the death of their master's only son.

Xavier had " stepped out " as he spoke of doing,—that is, he had repaired to the chapel of the sons of St. Ignatius, and was now absorbed in prayer, his eyes fixed upon the glittering slabs enclosing the bodies of the holy martyrs. A mysterious twilight enveloped the sanctuary, and a vague perfume of incense was still floating around. From those interlacing arches, those walls covered with holy images, those altars adorned with flowers, those crimson crowns, those sepulchral stones, chanting sweetness and glory in death, came peace and strength to the soul.

Happy are they who know how to snatch themselves from the activity of the outward life, and take refuge a moment in this blessed enclosure, as in a peaceful, shady island that the hand of Providence has raised up amidst the waves of a torrent !

Xavier's eyes were fixed upon the marble slabs recording the names that an impious hatred has made great for eternity: Olivaint, Clerc, de Bengy, Ducondray, Caubert.

"O my God," he murmured, "have I understood Thee? Dost Thou indeed permit me to aspire so high? Ah! it is the virtues of my mother Thou art going to recompense in me. Have pity on my weakness!"

He had been thus absorbed in meditation about half an hour, when he was disturbed by the noise of a chair gliding over the chapel floor. He now perceived that his solitude was shared by a young girl who had just fallen on her knees, a few steps from him, before the altar of the martyrs. Her clasped hands rested upon the back of a kneeling stool; her head was raised, and her gaze riveted upon the three blessed ones, who with their victorious crosses, adorn the *reredos*.

The light of a votive taper illumined her countenance. Alas! the sorrows of life had doubtless already shaded this young existence, for years flowed from those eyes fixed upon the image of the martyrs, and an expression of mingled pride, love and sorrow gave a poetic grandeur to features beautiful of themselves. Such must have been the aspect of Cecilia and Agnes, those angels of purity, courage and hope, as they threw themselves on their knees in the catacombs be-

fore the mangled bodies of their martyred brethren.

Xavier was filled with an involuntary feeling of astonishment and admiration. He felt confidence in this young stranger, and his thoughts at once reverted to Poland and her heroic children. But in exile, the daughters of Poland are poor and wear the mourning of their country; whilst this Christian maiden, on the contrary, was dressed with an elegance and taste, betokening fortune and position, neither of which, however, could conceal the bleeding heart that throbbed beneath the rich apparel.

"Ah! here is a soul that suffers," said Xavier, adding the next moment,

"If so, O my God, do Thou sustain it, and may its tears obtain of Thee, that which it comes hither to seek!"

He passed out noiselessly, fearing to disturb a fervent prayer, and judging it near the appointed hour for Madame to return, he went at once to the house.

Said old Pierre, "Madame is still out, and we are beginning to get anxious, for she is always so punctual."

It is not quite three o'clock," replied Xavier, "so do not worry about her return. I came a little in advance, lest I should cause her to wait for me."

“Ah! indeed Monsieur,” said the old man, a smile illumining his honest face. “Jacques must have made a mistake in thinking he heard it sound three o’clock from the good Fathers. And besides, Monsieur, we are always anxious when Madame goes any distance in the city, for so many accidents happen in Paris, every day, and our dear lady is no longer young.”

Speaking thus the old servant opened the door of a little parlor, advanced an arm-chair and raised one of the window blinds. When all was arranged to his satisfaction, making a respectful inclination, he retired, saying: “I hope Monsieur may not have to wait long.”

Xavier now took up a pamphlet lying upon the table and glanced through it; he then did the same with a number of the *Union* left half open, and finally, he began to look around him, carefully examining all the contents of this familiar room, which he had seen numberless times, but without giving them any special attention.

The Marquise’s little parlor was an octagon shaped apartment, with high ceiling and facing the east. Its sombre hangings displayed to advantage a portrait by Velasquez, not surpassed in beauty by a Correggio upon the adjoining panel. From three sides of the walls hung Aubusson tapestries concealing three doors, one of which opened into the vestibule, another into the grand

reception room, and a third into Mme. de Valbret's chamber. A mantel-piece ornamented with an armorial lambrequin and a window occupied two other sides of the room, whilst before the eighth side was placed an old leathern arm-chair, rough and common, singularly enough out of place amidst such surroundings, had it not been for the little stool before it covered with India carpet, and the placard of cedar upon the back, bearing this inscription: "*May 12th, 1647, in visiting the Marquis Hugues de Valbret, St. Vincent de Paul sat in this chair.*" The traditions of the family say that it was in a rustic hunting pavilion, the apostle of charity thus honored the Marquis; also, that the result of their interview was the foundation of a church on a portion of the estate, hitherto deprived of all religious privileges.

The other pieces of furniture in the room, though more than sufficient as regards number, were very incongruous; and it was easily seen that not taste so much as a desire to preserve mementoes had guided the selection. For instance, a handsome and expensive Boule table supported a very ordinary writing desk; a Sèvres clock had two of its beautiful flowers concealed by a little plaster Madonna; miniatures from the hands of acknowledged artists lay in precious caskets amidst a collection of other objects not only apparently valueless, but indeed of doubtful freshness. One felt

that a soul lived amidst these relics, the most ancient of which recalled past splendors, the most trifling and insignificant, tenderness and perhaps sorrow. This impression would have been confirmed had one attempted to open the door leading to the reception room ; but it was carefully closed, thus forming an impassable barrier between those general relations, and those inmost thoughts which gave to every object of this little parlor, language and strong powers of attraction. The door of the chamber, on the contrary was open, and behind the tapestry concealing it, one heard the music of a bird,—sweet and innocent distraction of this solitary fireside. The most striking-feature however in this apartment seemingly chosen as a depositary and guardian of the past, was a picture suspended on the wall, just above the arm-chair so honored by St. Vincent de Paul. Could this picture be a portrait, or was it only the image of a fleeting vision? It represented a young man upon his bier. The head was of a most aristocratic type, and at the same time, of celestial beauty. The eyes were closed, the hands clasped ; thoughts of heaven had imparted to the lips a smile which death had fixed upon them forever. He was clothed in the Dominican habit, and a wooden cross rested upon his heart.

In gazing upon the picture, one was filled with

an indefinable impression, too calm for melancholy, an impression approaching even to the sublime. This work bore no signature, though traced by a skilful hand—the artist was forgotten in the presence of his model. On the bottom of the frame were inscribed three dates : April 12, 1840—December 8, 1861—May 20, 1863. Crowns of roses ornamented the upper corners, and at each side, upon little oaken stands, bloomed the last chrysanthemums of the season.

As Xavier contemplated this picture, his countenance was illumined with the same expression it had worn in the martyrs' chapel.

“Jean,” murmured he, “I scarcely knew you, for I was still a child when you left home, and yet I can never forget you. I shall always remember your last kiss, and especially your last words. You had taken me upon your knee ; looking at me with a smile you said, ‘Be good, Xavier, be good even little as you are. There are so many foolish ones, notwithstanding their years.’ You were right, ‘the number of fools,’ says Holy Scriptures, ‘is infinite.’ You, even at twenty years of age, comprehended this truth. . . . Pray for me, aid me. Prove to me now by your assistance, how powerful is the intercession of a friend in Heaven.”

Xavier remained a long time contemplating

the picture; at last, seating himself again, he said with a sigh,

“My poor Etienne! Every passing moment sweeps away a part of his advantages and hopes!”

Just then the time-piece sounded half-past three o'clock, and at the same instant, was heard the closing of the vestibule door. Xavier arose, giving vent to his relief in an audible,

“At last!”

CHAPTER III.

ALPHONSE'S AGILITY.

FOR a considerable length of time has M. de Bois Rougés been forced to practice patience. Having apparently reached the moment when his trial seems at an end, let us leave him to realize whether or not his hopes were premature, and now turn to Alphonse. We last saw him reclining indolently in the soft blue arm-chair, warming his feet, and bewailing, oh! bewailing most sincerely, his cousin's indifference to the goods of this life. He then spent about an hour revolving in his mind the compliments he must address Mlle. Vangaramenghen, or, rather the stepmother, for it seemed to him at first very important to his cause that he should secure the favor of the latter however, as she was determined to get rid of her stepdaughter at all events, the question assumed another aspect—Madame's favor did not count for so much. He pondered this weighty matter, and at last decided that he had better exert his best efforts to please the young lady herself.

Having settled this momentous point, he now

began to think of the most agreeable manner in which he could pass the three intervening hours between the present and his interview with his aunt and dear auxiliary, the Baroness de Grenaff.

For the last fortnight, nature had been wrapped in November's humid, melancholy veil, and a stroll in the woods was out of the question. Alphonse clearly understood that he must carefully regulate his expenses, especially now when on the eve of marriage.

"Xavier economizes from taste, I from necessity," he murmured with a touch of ill humor, "that is where we differ."

He rang the bell. One of the attendants appeared. "Bring me to-day's journals," said Alphonse.

The servant returned bringing ten.

"Does Monsieur think he will need them long?" said the latter, laying the big pile on the table.

"About five minutes," was the young man's answer.

This specified time, though short indeed, was not consumed. In the first paper he unfolded, Alphonse saw the announcement of a concert to be given by two performers in a private hall near the Palais Royal. The tickets were offered at a moderate price.

"Here is the very thing," said he.

Then continuing to read, "It will commence at half past two precisely."

"Plague!" he exclaimed, "I have but an hour in which to dress and get there!"

He immediately began to make his toilette, and let us remember that this same toilette was to be that of his presentation in the evening. The extreme care bestowed upon it merited real success. When, after much consulting of his mirror it assured him that he was irreproachable in appearance, both as regards elegance of manner and fashionable attire, hastening from his room, to avoid being late, he determined to take, not a carriage, for alas! the stands were all empty, but "the chariot accessible to all," as the poet says,—the omnibus, to call it by its proper name,—the omnibus, of which we must not speak ill, for if it be the most ordinary means of transport, it is likewise the most accommodating and easy to obtain.

Bewailing the necessity of using a vehicle so plebeian, and enjoying in anticipation plans and scenes wherein the handsomest and most stylish carriages were at his command, Alphonse reached the office which opens on the street, and inquired for the Palais Royal omnibus.

Malediction! 53 was the number handed him and the roll commenced at 14. Indignantly reject-

ing the card assigning his place among those in waiting like himself, he walked rapidly towards the Rue Lepelletier.

"I shall find the vehicle," thought he, "and perhaps be able to secure a seat. As to waiting there in that silly crowd, never!"

The rolling mass appeared in the Rue Notre-Dame de Lorette. It could be descried from afar, shaking the group perched upon it, and towering above all other vehicles near, as the elephants of Pyrrhus amidst the horses. Suddenly, it slackens its course. An aged woman dressed in black and carrying a satchel the weight of which appears too much for her, claims its hospitality. But the road is impeded, the omnibus cannot stop immediately, and although the poor woman makes every effort she cannot reach it. At last, there remains but one street to cross. A carriage now appears, and to avoid this new obstacle, she attempts to run. Just at this moment, a young man darts out of the Rue de Chateaubriand, and from the distance, raises as a signal, the cane in his hand. The conductor answers by a negative sign. But, at a glance, the young man comprehends the situation and bounds forward. Gracious! what agility! in this respect, nature has beyond a doubt, most marvelously endowed him. In two bounds he has cleared the distance, and, in yet another, the high step. He enters, he takes his seat, whilst the

old woman's trembling fingers have not yet touched the iron bar.

"Full!" cries the conductor, showing the discouraging placard.

"Alas!" sighs the old lady.

A laugh mingled with silly remarks is elicited from a few occupants of the omnibus, in which vulgar gayety, however, the young victor takes no part, the only expression he betrays of having even observed it being a contemptuous curl of the lip. Throwing out of the open window the stump of a cigar which he held in his fingers, he takes from his pocket the day's *Figaro*, and quietly settles himself to its perusal, without giving himself any concern either as to his victim or his surroundings. But suddenly, an indignant voice is heard at the farther end of the omnibus.

"Stop, conductor, stop immediately!" it says.

The unwieldy vehicle which had just made a move, preparatory to resuming its course, again comes to a halt. A pale, dignified, aristocratic looking young man arises, and, with contracted brows, passes in front of the much-amused individuals who now murmur aloud, and the sprightly, agile walker, who bestows upon him a glance of impertinence as if resenting his conduct. All understand the meaning of this sudden resolution. Having reached the step, the young man awaits the old lady's approach. He respectfully

offers her his hand, assists her into the omnibus, and making a slight salutation, is about to move off.

"Your fare," says the conductor.

"Sure enough," he replies, handing him the ticket, "I had forgotten it."

The old lady looks around at these words. They confirm her in the opinion that this passenger has not finished his journey, especially as his gait on turning away is most rapid. She watches him until the increasing distance hides him from view. As for himself, he never dreams of observing closely enough to remember, the individual he has so charitably assisted. And, indeed, it was scarcely possible for him to do so, as she had merely passed him and a thick veil covered her face. Beneath this veil, he had perceived only the long white curls, shading features of an aquiline cast which were illumined by a pair of unusually bright eyes. He was not near enough for a scrutinizing examination, and moreover, what young man would trouble himself seriously about such a poor old woman, evidently of a very humble class? Her garments were scrupulously neat and clean, but likewise inexpensive, her dress being of very ordinary material, and also the black shawl wrapped around her shoulders. Doubtless, she belonged to that innumerable family of the poor and needy, although her voice had

a ring of refinement as she thanked the young man who assisted her into the omnibus, and a hand of rare whiteness and delicacy for one accustomed to manual labor was revealed, as she drew off her woollen glove to search her portemonnaie for the omnibus fare.

Now that her charitable assistant has disappeared, she directs her glances towards her agile adversary, who, utterly unconcerned remains absorbed by an article in his favorite journal. He smiles.

“That rascal of a fellow, Villemessant!” thinks he, “upon my word, it is incredible!”

However, this agreeable reading must be interrupted. Their path suddenly widens; on the right, are fountains leaping in the air; and on the left, a colonnade protecting pedestrians. Behold the Palais Royal with its degenerated splendors, its ignominious souvenirs. Why is it that this magnificent structure seems to have possessed the sad power of giving birth to guilty rivalries, for here originated much that sapped and undermined an ancient loyalty? But in politics, as in fairy tales, arrows frequently turn back against those who send them. Alas!—but let us return to our travellers, and think no more about this palace denied the presence of its true hosts.

The omnibus stops. Alphonse descends first, and darts down the Rue Saint Honoré in time to

hear the close of the concert. Several other passengers also get off at this point, among them the old lady. On rising to leave her seat, she perceives for the first time, a little package which some one had evidently forgotten. She picks it up and opens it. The contents are only a few notes in pencil, and about twenty cards bearing an address.

A lady opposite bends over and says,

"It belongs to the young man who occupied the seat just before you came in. I saw him take it from his pocket. Give it to the conductor."

"No, it is not necessary to do that," replies the old lady, "I will take charge of it myself and see that it is sent to the address indicated."

So saying, she puts the package in her satchel, and in turn descends from the omnibus.

She stands waiting; carriages pass, but all are filled.

"Vaugirard, is it you?" inquires a woman near, who, sighs deeply at each disappointment.

"Yes, alas!" is the answer.

"Yes, but you have plenty of time to wait!"

"On the contrary, that is just what I doubt, I don't think I have," says our old lady, cautiously taking out a heavily cased watch, chased in the Louis XVI. style and ornamented with rubies,—a most beautiful and valuable article.

She perceives that it is now four minutes past three.

"It is impossible to depend on coaches," she murmurs. "That poor child is waiting. Hereafter, when I go out on such missions, I will order the carriage."

At this instant, a coach crosses the square. She sees it, makes a signal, and is soon seated in the vehicle, congratulating herself on this providential succor. She gives the driver her address, and, no doubt, a generous fee, for he whips up his horse, and starts off at a gallop, something very unusual indeed.

CHAPTER IV.

PLANS.

"AT last! It is Madame the Marquise!" said old Pierre, opening for his mistress the door behind which he had more than once lent an anxious ear. "We all began to be uneasy. Madame must be greatly fatigued."

"Not very much, thank you, but I am very late. And M. de Bois Rougés?"

"He has been waiting in the little parlor for the last hour."

"Poor child! go immediately and tell him of my return, and that I will see him at once."

With these words, Mme. de Valbret entered her chamber. A young girl dressed in the costume of the Bressoise peasantry was on her knees before the fire-place, endeavoring to enkindle a flame that would dispel the utmost rigors of a winter's day.

"I was just going to ring for you, Françoise," said the Marquise. "Bring me my dress immediately."

Changing the plain garments she had worn in the street, for an elegant dress more becoming

her station, she likewise adorned her white locks with a morning cap of rich Mechlin point.

"There is the pattern of the garment you are to make," said she, addressing the young girl, and pointing to the satchel that she had laid upon a little stand. "Cut the sleeves somewhat longer. But, wait a minute."

Opening the satchel, which the young peasant promoted to the dignity of waiting-maid, had already seized, the Marquise drew forth a package which she placed in her secretary.

"You will have to be expeditious," she added, "for I promised that the garment should be tried on day after to-morrow."

"Must I not change the ribbon bows on Madame's dress for this evening?" inquired the young girl.

"No, no ; leave them just as they are, and devote your time to the coat, which is much more needed."

And the Marquise opened the door leading to the little parlor.

"My dear child, excuse me," said she, pressing Xavier's hand and making him take a seat beside her. "I acknowledge my delinquency, but you know the best intentions are often thwarted by unforeseen obstacles."

"I should be truly sorry, Madame," replied Xavier, "if I supposed, for an instant, that the thought of making me wait had troubled

you in the least or deranged any of your plans."

"Not at all deranged them; and besides, here I am, so let us think no more of the past, but give our attention to the present. And first of all, let me hear something about my old friend. I say old friend, because of the many years' duration of our friendship, for she is at least twenty years my junior."

"You look a little younger, nevertheless, I think," said Xavier smiling. "However, she is very well, also, my sister, and I am charged with tendering you the affectionate regards of the one and sincere respects of the other."

"Give this to Queen Marguerite for me," said the Marquise, extending her hand towards a piece of rice paper covered with little Chinese figures. "Yesterday I received several of these. Father Gerbault sent them to me from Canton."

"How kind you are!" said Xavier, "Marguerite will come herself to thank you. As to me, I present myself to-day as a petitioner."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Marquise, "how much pleasure, my dear child, this affords me! Be assured in advance that I will do my best for you."

"I have presumed, Madame, to rely upon your kindness. I come to place in your hands the future of one of my dearest friends."

“That he is your friend is sufficient recommendation to insure my cordial support. ‘Those who resemble, assemble,’ Xavier. Your friends, I know are worthy of you.”

“Indeed, Madame, you do him a wrong in comparing him to me,” said the young Viscount with considerable emotion. As for myself, that God has kept me from wandering in dangerous paths is no merit of my own. I should be very ungrateful, if I could ignore the blessings with which Providence surrounded my youth and education. I had the misfortune to lose my father, it is true; and though feeling the loss most deeply, I suffered in no other way from his death, for you know the watchful, tender care of my estimable mother. When with her or my instructors I was enveloped in a holy atmosphere. They taught me so well how to relish honest, innocent, refined pleasures that I had no desire to seek any other. Facilitated by fortune, no rational desires of mine remained ungratified; my wishes were even anticipated. The members of my family amidst whom I live are endowed with most admirable qualities of heart and mind, and they are also in good health; hence, they are a great satisfaction and comfort to me. Indeed, life has been for me as a gentle stream over which I have glided, impelled towards good by beloved hands; whilst, he of whom I speak, Madame, has had to

struggle from his earliest youth against all manner of difficulties and trials. After witnessing the sufferings of his parents during all his childhood, he was left an orphan. The death of his mother, when he was but fifteen years old, constituted him the head of the family, consisting of an infirm grandmother and two sisters younger than himself,—his only heritage. By dint of courage, labor and perseverance, he has succeeded in placing his little sisters at the Sacred Heart convent, and giving the grandmother the comforts necessary to her advanced age and failing health, to accomplish all which has, no doubt, cost him great and continual struggles. In the various offices where he endeavored to make a living, in the schools where the necessary knowledge was to be acquired, the moral atmosphere was far from pure or healthy. He beheld himself surrounded by infidels and libertines. He had to submit to all manner of raillery, listen to sophistry and the seductive persuasions of the votaries of irreligion, and even sometimes face the hatred of the instructors, unable to pardon the unswerving piety and morality of a young man of twenty, notwithstanding their utmost efforts to undermine his Christian principles. Nothing ever succeeded in forcing him one step out of the path of rectitude which he had chosen. Faith was his strength; thoughts of his sisters, his ægis; and

love of his poor old grandmother, his consolation. These were enough. Twelve years passed amidst such trials, and he is now morally just what he was, when upon the benches at Vaugirard we studied Greek and Latin together. I am devotedly attached to him, and if your influence should succeed in procuring him the much desired situation, I hardly know which of us would be the happier and more grateful, he or I."

"Truly," said the Marquise, "I should share this gratitude myself, could I aid such noble efforts. Come, dear child, push my writing desk a little nearer. I will take a few notes from your dictation, and write immediately to my brother-in-law, for I shall not see M. de Biran before to-morrow, and this matter must not be deferred so long; an hour's delay might lose our case. I am of the number of those who deem promptness a most powerful auxiliary. However, I do not wish you to raise your friend's hopes too high. I do not presume to think that my recommendation alone would determine my brother-in-law's choice. On some subjects, there exists between us a certain divergence of opinion which though not affecting our friendship, no doubt, sometimes impairs my influence with him. I cannot really decide anything for your friend; I can merely aid him. So, try then, my good Xavier, to find out if this young man does not know of

another means of approach to M. de Biran. We will act in concert."

"Alas! Madame," said Xavier, "like you, I fear my friend's competitors may carry the day against him. I cannot see him before to-morrow, for he is now occupied in arguing a very important case which will doubtless engage him till late at night."

"Is he a lawyer?"

"Yes, Madame, this is his profession, an eminent and noble one, which I feel convinced it costs him much to renounce, but *he who accepts duty conscientiously, necessarily accepts sacrifice.*"

"From what you have told me, I feel much interested in him. A thought has just crossed my mind, which I believe may solve all these difficulties. I will write to my brother-in-law, warmly recommending your friend, and requesting him not to make the appointment until he sees me to-morrow. This evening, I receive a few friends. Bring this young man here this evening, so that I may have the pleasure in person of promising him my assistance. This will afford me an opportunity of conversing with him, and obtaining from his own lips much information that may materially aid his cause."

"Oh! how kind you are, Madame. I will hasten to inform his grandmother that he may ex-

pect me to call for him this evening. It will give me much pleasure to present him to you."

"You need not be in such haste," said the Marquise laughing, as Xavier arose immediately. "You have forgotten one important detail, without which it would be impossible for me to designate my protégé,—I mean his name."

"Well, really, have I not told you?"

"No, my dear child, you have not."

"I am certainly very absent minded! I must have been so completely absorbed in the story that I forgot all about the name."

"So I think, for I still have acute hearing and a good memory."

"Ah! Madame," exclaimed Xavier, "I am indignant at such assurances. I have a mind to write the address, but no, no, I shall not do that; I shall only tell you the name, and that in a whisper."

And whilst the Marquise bent forward, as if trying to catch the words which Xavier feigned to pronounce with extreme care, she heard him utter:

"M. Etienne Le Mahouet, number twenty, Rue de Babylon."

"Etienne Le Mahouet?" exclaimed Mme. de Valbret, with a sudden start.

"Yes," said Xavier, in astonishment; "are you acquainted with him, Madame?"

"The name is familiar, I must have seen it

somewhere," replied the Marquise, avoiding a direct answer to the question. "You must be sure to bring him this evening; come just as soon as he is at leisure. You are perhaps astonished, Xavier, that I am going to have a little reception, and without sending your excellent mother an invitation. But listen to the explanation which I wish you to make my old friend."

"There is no need of any, Madame."

"Yes, I am anxious for her to know that I have not forgotten her. The reception comes about in this way. My grandniece, Mme. de Broz, has just come to Paris, where she is to remain only a few days, and then join her husband, who, as you know, is attached to the Austrian embassy. Formerly, on such occasions, she made her home with her father-in-law, but M. de Broz, by reason of a severe attack of gout is confined to his country-seat. This was a great disappointment to the poor child who had anticipated much pleasure in meeting her old acquaintances. She made me the confidante of her troubles, and laid her petition before me in such a manner that I could not refuse to replace her father-in-law, at least, for a simple reception. So, telling her to write out the list of invitations, I merely glanced over them, and laying aside my own personal friendships, concluded to make preparations for a reception to her friends. She is delighted; as for

myself, my only pleasure in the matter springs from the thought of affording her so much. Some of the invited guests are strangers to me ; with some I have a slight acquaintance, not sufficient to awaken any feelings of interest, whilst others are not altogether congenial to my taste. Mme. de Broz took the liberty of adding a few names to the list of invitations that she had shown me at first. When she told me of it, I felt like scolding her for behaving so like a spoiled child," added the Marquise with a smile, "but I knew she would offer such pleasant and irresistible excuses, that in advance, I determined to approve of all she did. I think it better in many instances to act thus, ignoring or quietly passing things over," she continued with a sigh. "I say it to you, my child, that this gay fashionable assemblage in my house would never take place, and would be a source of much grief to me, were not my sole motive the desire of gratifying others."

At these words, she raised her eyes to the portrait of the young monk.

"We will let the rest enjoy themselves there," she added, extending her hand towards the grand reception room, whilst we come here to talk over our plans."

"Yes," answered Xavier, "since you permit it, we will come here that another may rejoice with us, at your kindness to an orphan."

And he, in turn, raised his eyes to the beautiful face of the young religious.

"Ah! yes," exclaimed the Marquise, "I feel that he is always near me, like a second guardian angel."

She extended Xavier a hand trembling with emotion, which he took and respectfully pressed to his lips.

"This evening then, Madame," said he, rising.

The Marquise inclined her head, and as Xavier lifted the Aubusson portière to take his departure, she smiled an adieu.

Just as the young Viscount was descending the stairs he heard a woman's voice pronounce Mme. de Valbret's name.

"She is at home," said the porter, whose room was just under the turn of the staircase.

The rustling of a silk dress immediately announced the visitor's approach, and just as Xavier reached the last step, a lady emerged from a recess in the vestibule, and placed her hand upon the railing. Xavier, hat in hand, drew back a few steps to let her pass, and then, as she thanked him by a modest inclination, he bowed respectfully, recognizing to his astonishment, the young girl he had just seen praying and weeping in the Jesuit church.

At this very hour, a considerable distance from

the scene we have just witnessed, Alphonse stood at the dwelling of his aunt, the Baroness de Grenaff, which was situated in a disagreeable, uninviting street, to which, however, the proximity of the Champs Elysées lent a savor of aristocratic gentility. A servant whose frizzed hair was ornamented with a bow of ribbon, introduced him into the parlor. There, a lady was seated upon a little sofa, reading, both feet, which displayed Algerian slippers, held up to the fire. Hearing Alphonse's footsteps, followed by his voice saluting her with a pleasant, "Good morning, aunt, how are you?" she stretched out a hand in vacancy, and said:

"Good morning, my dear. In an instant, I will be at your service. You perceive that I am completely carried away; this story is really heart-rending; I cannot stop immediately!"

Alphonse quietly took a seat, having grasped the hand extended to meet his own. Whilst his aunt continued her reading, Alphonse killed time by taking a survey of the parlor and its surroundings. Nearly everything in it was of that superficial, transient style of beauty which derives its chief value from being fashionable, and, in consequence, deteriorates with the lapse of time. However, a few costly pieces of Faience and a Rhodonite cup ornamented with most delicately wrought figures recalled days of past splendor,

and souvenirs of distinguished attention conferred upon the Austrian general's wife. No visitor was allowed to remain long ignorant of the history of these articles, for one could not spend ten minutes in Mme. de Grenaff's company without learning that the former had been given her by the Queen of Bavaria, to whom, for the space of six months, she had been maid of honor. And still more promptly were they acquainted with the fact that the cup was a gift from the Empress of Austria—really from the Empress herself, who, delighted with the pains taken by our heroine in getting up a ball in one of the little towns through which Her Majesty passed, whilst General de Grenaff was stationed there in command of the military, had thus shown her appreciation of it. Alas! these daily, even hourly pleasures so easily within reach of the Baroness then, had always been marred by what she styled the stern, ill temper of her husband, who, in reality, was a man of very noble character. He died. And she who more than once had declared herself a slave, and suffering from the oppression of tyranny, was now at liberty. But, oh! the irony of fate! the hour which struck off the prisoner's chains, likewise closed the door between her and many coveted pleasures. This door was wide and gave her entrance into the highest circles at court, but the key of it was confided to a powerful genius named For-

tune. And lo, when the General lay down to his final rest in a tomb worthy of him, the genius took flight and the door remained closed. In this change of position no one was to blame, so Mme. de Grenaff was spared all feeling of resentment and animosity. Life annuities and a handsome salary formed nearly the bulk of the Baron's revenues. The comparatively slight inheritance, which, in accordance with his last wishes, was to be divided between his two sisters and his wife, bore to each a pledge of affection. When the provisions of a will strictly carried out, cause no bickerings nor ill feelings among the legatees, but on the contrary, ensure their continued gratitude towards the deceased and respect for his last wishes, it can readily be understood that it must have been an admirable document. It was thus with M. de Grenaff's, and the very moderate amount of the sum to be divided likewise contributed towards this peaceful result.

The Baroness was determined not to remain at Vienna, where her reduced circumstances would have been such a cruel blow to her self-love. Neither could she make up her mind to share with her sister, Alphonse's mother, the monotonous life and prosaic cares of a rural home on the borders of Anjou. She decided to make her home in Paris, and thence to travel, as much as her means permitted, returning to Paris at option. Quite

skilful in many ways, she was able to renovate and transform her toilettes so as always to make in the various assemblies she frequented, an appearance suitable to her station. Gay, animated, thoroughly acquainted with all the customs of the most fashionable and highest Austrian circles, never hesitating to draw upon her imagination for the embellishment of her narrative when realities did not suffice, she was one of those puerile, self-possessed, amusing talkers much appreciated in the world. She was very fond of reading, and devoured with avidity all the new novels, by which means she was enabled greatly to enhance the interest of some of her sketches of memory. Knowing how to derive advantages from these deceptions, she could excite sympathy and interest without compromising her dignity. Invitations poured in upon her, especially as she was not hypercritical in the choice of her friends, provided their position was a fashionable one, and they could entertain.

How was it that she had never once thought of introducing into this circle of gayety, amidst which she found her happiness, a nephew as avaricious of enjoying such festivities as herself? Two reasons may be found in answer to this question. First, Alphonse really preferred the country, and would not willingly have exchanged his life of ease there for one of useful industry in

Paris. We have seen in his conversation with Xavier which way his dreams drifted, and how in the anticipated moment of opulence his heart involuntarily reverted to the rural estate in Touraine. The thought of coming to Paris occasionally for a little diversion was all the attraction the great city held out for him—in fact, he considered frivolities and amusements its only resources. This ignorance was, no doubt, the result of his father's death, the influence of a mother, whose faith was as feeble as her mind was contracted, and also of the education received at a little lay college of the province. Happily, a pure heart and an upright, honest soul had preserved the poor young man from finding the poison that is usually mingled with the cup of indolence.

The second and principal reason which explains Mme. de Grenaff's negligence in not introducing Alphonse to the gay circles she frequented, is to be found in the fact that people who love themselves very much, spend little time or thought on others. Around the egotist a thousand little reasons for acting thus entwine themselves forming, as it were, an invisible rampart. He is there intrenched, sometimes reviewing these motives in his mind and pondering them, but oftener giving no heed to them whatever.

Alphonse was not in the habit of sounding

moral questions very deeply. However, he lacked not a certain degree of penetration on this point, —Mme. de Grenaff's neglect of him. It could hardly be otherwise, for every time he came to Paris, his aunt and cousins of the Bois Rougés family gave him a most cordial welcome, evinced by all manner of affectionate attentions; whilst on this solemn day wherein we have just witnessed this aunt's reception of him, he could positively declare he was going to dine with her —this dear aunt, for the first time. Whilst she finishes the adventures of her hero of romance, Alphonse's thoughts wander from the anticipated touching interview of the coming eve to a more material, less romantic subject, the delightful repast so soon to tickle his appetite in the house of his aunt, a woman accustomed to all the delicacies of Paris.

At last, the rigors of November and the increasing shadows of a narrow street completely eclipsed the light of day in this apartment. The Baroness was compelled to put aside the romance she found so charming.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, throwing down the book, "my head is so fatigued reading. But come, dear, let us talk of yourself. What do you think of my little plans, my lucky hit?"

"O, aunt, you are like the fairies."

"Seven hundred thousand francs' dowry and a château!"

"A château! You must come and spend the summers with us."

"Oh, that is understood!" eagerly replied the Baroness.

"Indeed, we shall be very happy to receive you. Now, aunt, since you are acquainted with Mme. and Mlle. Vangaramenghen, pray give me some instructions as to how I must comport myself in this very important matter, for it is necessary above all things that I commit no blunders, but make a favorable impression upon them."

"Be calm, I have prepared the way. It is advisable that you seem very susceptible, and smitten at first sight."

"But yet, aunt,"—began Alphonse, slightly piqued.

"Do you not see that this is a very skilful stroke of policy? If one is agreeable when regarded from an ordinary point of view, how much more so when—"

"Must I appear timid?"

"Timid! how absurd. Do you wish them to think you stupid? You must, on the contrary, make every effort to be agreeable and appear to advantage."

"Do they waltz?"

"I think not. Are you, then, a fine waltzer?"

"Oh! yes, aunt, I am a Vestris."

"It is a great pity," said the Baroness, laughing, "you could have won their admiration by your agility."

"You need not make fun of my agility, aunt, for without it I should have been a lost man this very day. I have waged war, gained the victory, scaled the wall, and secured myself behind the intrenchments."

"What do you mean," replied Mme. de Grenaff. "You must remember that I am not an Œdipus, my dear."

"Let me explain the riddle. This afternoon a frightful old woman, a Meg transformed into a Parisian sorceress, one of the Three Fates, having a leisure hour, dared cast her eyes upon the seat I longed to obtain that I might reach a certain quarter of the city to hear a delightful concert. She had almost reached the omnibus when an unexpected obstacle arrested her progress. It was then 'I came, I saw, I conquered.' . . . In a voice of wrath my enemy doomed me to the infernal gods, but I, calm in my triumph, turned my head, and abandoned her to her dreams of vengeance!"

Mme. de Grenaff laughed and shrugged her shoulders. "Foolish fellow," said she, "you are always the same. Mme. Vangaramenghen will

find you very amusing. But give me your arm, dinner is ready."

The dining-room resembled a greenhouse, so great was the profusion of plants it contained; trailing vines, green branches, flowers of every description fell from the ceiling, were grouped in vases, ornamented the pier tables or were twined around the buffet. None of them were at all valuable, and as for beauty, its place was supplied by quantity. One could clearly discern in all this, the love of luxury, which forcibly restrained, still sought to satisfy itself at as little cost as possible.

"One might imagine himself in Eden," said Alphonse graciously, resting his glances upon these humble spoils of the garden.

"Only in this Eden you are permitted to taste all," answered the Baroness, passing her nephew a plate of soup.

Alphonse was hungry, and in consequence, ready to do speedy justice to this course. However, the Baroness uncovered a dish which disclosed something of a dark color, and familiar, very familiar to the eyes of the guest.

"Do you like *bouillet*, Alphonse?"

"But—yes, aunt, yes, very much."

"I am devoted to it, and since I have made my home in Paris, I eat it every day. It is so tender, so delicate. Isn't it delicious?"

"Oh! delicious, aunt."

"But you have taken such a small piece. Cut a larger piece, my dear. Here, you are at home."

"So I perceive," thought Alphonse.

"Will you not season it with a little *caviare*? I have some delightful *caviare*, it is the Ortoff brand. Hand me the bottle, Madeleine,—that one at the end of the pantry."

"No thanks, aunt, do not take that trouble."

"You would really believe yourself in Russia. Did you ever taste *caviare*?"

"Once, and I must confess I prefer remaining in France."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Baroness, "charming, charming! charming! You do not lack spirit. Never mind the *caviare*, Madeleine, hand me only the spices."

"What! aunt, that hand that was once kissed by an archduke—"

"That hand is going to dress this fine salad, whilst awaiting the hour for signing your marriage contract, which is no doubt, very near."

"And it is to you I shall owe my happiness. Really, I do not know how I shall ever be able to testify my gratitude."

"Ah! my poor child, I am delighted at your good fortune, I assure you. You can well be proud of your wife, for Renée is beautiful. To be candid, her stepmother is in the wrong. I

am very fond of Mme. Vangaramenghen, and find her delightful, but I must confess that she has sometimes been a little too exacting. How could it be otherwise? She had been spoiled in her own family; she had held absolute sway over her husband's household, and then suddenly, to be confronted by a beautiful, rich, accomplished stepdaughter who is determined to have her own way—it cannot indeed have been very agreeable. The real cause of the trouble, however—”

“They shall not influence me in the least,—I shall not bother myself about these questions.”

“Oh! you have said a good thing indeed! Endeavor to make Mlle. Vangaramenghen understand this. I shall tell her myself.”

“We will spend the most of our time in the country.”

“Do you not like Paris?”

“Yes, for a change. We will come to Paris when the hunting season is over.”

“I am convinced that Renée visits the poor in the neighborhood of her château—”

“I have no objection whatever to that, provided she does not insist upon my accompanying her.”

“And that she gives freely to them—”

“And that she shall continue to do. I certainly should not refuse her a few hundred francs when she brings me a fortune.”

“My dear,” said Mme. de Grenaff, “your words are golden. Renée shall know all this. I can easily find means of access to her. I should not be astonished if, ere leaving her this evening, matters were all settled between you. Now, let me give you a last piece of advice. This evening, I am going to take you to a house which I visit but seldom,—a *salon* of the old school. There you must be very dignified and discreet, and curb your imagination and spirits somewhat.”

“Yes, aunt, I understand; be at ease on this point,” answered Alphonse, delicately dropping a piece of sugar in the Gien cup before him, which he then filled with the coffee, that in his honor, Mme. de Grenaff had added, as the last course of this unceremonious dinner.

CHAPTER V.

RENEE.

MEANWHILE, Xavier de Bois Rougés had left the Marquise de Valbret with the full assurance that she would lend her most cordial support to the aid of his plans. Remaining a few moments pensive and motionless, as if following up an idea, she now rang for the servant.

"Pierre," said she, "descend to the lodge to inform all callers that I see no one before dinner."

"Yes, Madame," replied the old man, with an inclination.

Just as he left the room and went towards the steps, the entry door opened, and he found himself facing the young girl whom M. de Bois Rougés had met.

"Is Mme. de Valbret in?" said she, "I wish to see her."

"Madame does not receive to-day," replied Pierre, rigidly observing the orders just given him.

"You may admit me," replied the young girl, gently pushing open the door which the old man

held half closed. "Really, Pierre, you don't recognize me. I am—"

"Renée!" exclaimed a voice from the end of the vestibule, ere that individual had time to finish her sentence.

"Ah!" cried the latter, entering freely, and running to throw herself into the arms of the Marquise. "At last, I see you again!"

"May the good God pardon me! It is Mlle. Renée!" said Pierre, approaching timidly as if to excuse himself.

"It really is. But pray, Madame, let us be alone for the little while that I can remain with you."

"I am entirely at your service, my dear daughter. Hasten, Pierre, for I wish no one at all to come up."

The old servant obeyed, closing behind him the half-open door.

"Who came with you, Renée?" inquired Mme. de Valbret.

"No one."

"No one!"

"No one, thank God. I am going to give you a full explanation."

The Marquise took the young girl by the hand, led her to her chamber, and made her take a seat by the fire. Then Renée lay off her hat.

"Oh," she murmured, "I am smothering!"

Mme. de Valbret gazed a moment upon the beautiful head relieved of the velvet band which formed a sombre crown, and taking it in her two hands she imprinted upon it a long and affectionate kiss. At this motherly caress, the young girl gave vent to her feelings in sobs, apparently unable to restrain them.

"How happy I am," she exclaimed, "to be with you once again, although, alas! I come to-day without her."

"Our dear Fannie has gone whither we all are journeying," said the Marquise gently. "Bear up under this, my child, it is often better for us to be preceded to heaven by those who love us. We have not the power of keeping them here, whilst they, having reached the goal, have the power of attracting us to them."

"You are right," replied Renée, "but when the road is very thorny, we feel most sensibly the loss of their presence in sustaining and guiding us."

"Providence measures the trials of each to his strength, and he who hopes can conquer. You are in trouble, Renée. What is the matter? Why have you not written to me since you left the Sacred Heart?"

Renée shook her head.

"Would my letters have been sent? I doubt it. It is sad at my age to feel the need of extreme prudence, indeed, to have to be suspicious.

And this is why I consider it a great subject of gratitude to heaven that I have been able for a few hours at least, to escape the bondage in which I live."

"But my child, how is it that you come alone? It really astonishes me very much."

"I will tell you all by degrees," said Renée. "It will make the story shorter, and likewise, the better enable you to understand matters. Oh!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands, "just think, this is the first time, since leaving the convent, that I have had an opportunity of opening my heart to any one."

"It has been four years, dear Madame, since I saw you. In that visit, the last I made with my godmother, I was struck by one of her remarks. 'I do not complain of my bad health,' said she, 'but I should like to be spared five or six years longer.' Saying this, she regarded me tenderly. I did not then comprehend the full extent of her words, but I certainly do now. She coughed a good deal on leaving you, and when I suggested that she had done wrong to go out, she replied, 'I may not see Madeleine here again for a long time, since she is going to the country. When I am with her the hours fly, we are both about thirty years younger.'"

"Poor Fannie!" sighed the Marquise. "I can endorse her words. It was ever a source of

pleasure to me to renew that friendship begun in our youth, ere marriage settled our homes apart, one in La Bresse, the other in the interior of Touraine. The longer one lives and the more one sees of life, the stronger and dearer our early attachments, formed when the heart, free from guile and viewing all things through the light of happiness, is so capable of bestowing its affections."

"She talked to you a great deal about me, did she not?"

"Constantly, and especially after she became a widow. You were then her only care."

"She was so kind, so very kind! Her last words were about me. The day after we saw you, she was so sick that I sent for the doctor. He gave as his opinion that there was no cause for alarm, and I returned to the convent the same evening. Two days later, I was sent for in all haste; a pulmonary congestion had set in and my aunt was dying in most excruciating sufferings. 'I ought to have prepared her, I did not expect so soon'—she murmured, but here her voice failed, she was suffocating and never finished the sentence. One hour later, and she was no more. For the second time, I had lost my mother."

The young girl's tears choked her utterance, and the Marquise was scarcely less affected.

In a few moments, Renée continued.

“ My father, at the time, was in Switzerland with his wife and children, and did not return to Paris for a month. He came immediately to see me, and I perceived with gratification, that he was much grieved at my aunt’s death. He inquired if I wished to enter one of the fashionable boarding-schools, or to remain at the Sacred Heart. It was my aunt who had selected the latter for me, making this one of the conditions of my inheriting her fortune, a fact of which I had heretofore been in ignorance. Oh! how I bless this wise foresight, which had thus found means of bequeathing me at the same time both temporal and eternal riches! It was easy to convince my father that in no academy conducted by lay teachers would he find ladies of position, rich and learned, voluntarily embracing the life of instructresses, and thus imparting to their scholars that refinement, that elegance of bearing and deportment which being the result, not of labor but of early education, no studied effort can give. I mentioned to him among my companions, the names of several representatives of noble houses, or of families prominent for their immense wealth. In a short time, I had gained my cause, and it was agreed that as my stepmother always spent the vacation travelling, I should spend mine with such of my companions as the religious took to the sea-shore. Ere

finishing this conversation, my father informed me that my godmother had faithfully kept her promise, and that her death made me possessor of her château and five hundred thousand francs. In addition to this, I inherit my mother's property, and the future will thus double the above mentioned sum. Pardon me this detail, but it is necessary for you to know it."

"I remained at the convent over three years, going to my father's house only for a few hours, on New Year's day or on some of his favorite anniversaries. On these occasions, I always profited by the large sums of money he gave me, to buy handsome presents for my stepmother and the children. Of course, I and my gifts never lacked a hearty welcome, and for a long time, I enjoyed all manner of illusions concerning the household I now know so thoroughly.

"The day after attaining my nineteenth year, a letter from my father announced that in twenty-four hours, he would come to take me home, and my school days would be at an end. In several preceding letters he had alluded to this resolution, which my age really justified. However, he expressed regret at withdrawing me from the convent so abruptly, and apologized very gracefully to the Superioress, Mme. de Lussieu.

"After reading the perfectly polite letter my

father addressed her, the Superioress heaved a deep sigh and said,

“ ‘The hour is come, my child.’

“ ‘I answered with much emotion,

“ ‘Mother, I am deeply grieved at leaving you all, but I will not bid you adieu, for I expect to visit you often. Moreover, I return to the paternal roof with feelings of confidence. It is true, I shall not find there the tenderness and counsels of a mother, but Mme. Vangaramenghen has always treated me kindly, and I know that my father is devoted to me. Ah ! if my dear aunt were only living ! But she will never more be there to welcome me.’

“ ‘The Superioress sighed again.

“ ‘Renée,’ said she, ‘ dear and tender memories do not injure our hearts even when lacerating them. What I fear for you is not the past with its sorrows, but the present with its difficulties, and the future with its dangers.’

“ ‘I inquired in astonishment what she meant and she answered,

“ ‘I have often begged your aunt, were it only with myself, to cast off a little of the extreme reserve enveloping her words whenever she spoke of your father’s household, but she invariably replied : “I must observe and study the matter more closely, to avoid false judgment.” But the opportunity for this detailed study was lost

by reason of her being an invalid ; she could thus only view the surface. There resulted from this exaggerated prudence a vague anxiety which she communicated to myself, and which fills me with indefinable forebodings for your future in the midst of that family. She gave me the impression that your father was completely under his wife's influence, more especially as the cares and pre-occupations of his banking-house make it a necessity that his domestic life be peaceful and happy. Your aunt used often to say : " How I wish for Renée's sake that Mme. Vangaramenghen not only bore the name of Renée's mother, but likewise possessed her virtues." The last time I saw her, she said in speaking of you, " Make her very strong, very courageous, for I may be gone ere her hour of conflict begins." I asked her for an explanation. " It is too late to-day," she replied, " but I will tell you all at my next visit." This visit so anxiously looked forward to by me was never made, death forestalling it and thus depriving me of the earnestly desired information. Consequently, Renée, I have no certain foundation on which to base a judgment, and cannot tell you anything positive, or give you any definite or detailed advice on the subject. I feel a vague anxiety. You are going to be suddenly placed amid surroundings in which it may be an embarrassing and delicate question for you to

know how to act, and where you will be without a guide to direct your uncertain footsteps in such devious paths. You will have no one of whom to take counsel. See! then, how much necessity there is for joining prudence to courage, gentleness to firmness, that you may remain victoriously Christian, in a family where your faith will probably awaken only a feeble echo. Guard especially against the seductions of vanity and worldly pleasures, even those which are frivolously only and not dangerous. If you know how to employ your time, and in all you do consider the end, I answer for you, no matter what the circumstances in which you are placed. Do not neglect prayer; you will find therein light and strength. I will now leave you to make preparations for your departure, as you have not too much time."

"She embraced me and left the room. I ascended to my chamber (for not being subject to all the restrictions of class and school, I enjoyed the privilege of a private room), and there throwing myself on my knees before the crucifix, I buried my face in my hands. To express what I felt would be impossible. Mme. de Lussieu's words had opened before me a sudden perspective, and I struggled in anguish so much the more poignant in proportion to the obscurity enveloping the cause of it. Could it indeed be that the paternal roof towards which I so confidently

turned my steps, contained many a snare for my unwary feet? At first, I wept bitterly, mingling with my anxious fears, grief and regrets for her who was no more. Then I prayed. Remembering that St. Teresa when left an orphan cast herself at the Blessed Virgin's feet, entreating her to replace the mother just lost, I followed her example. When I arose, finding myself a little calmer, I began to reflect upon what course to pursue. Amidst the multiplicity of confused thoughts presenting themselves, but two things were clearly defined,—my determination to remain faithful to God, cost what it might, and the mutual affection of my father and self. I resolved to build my little citadel upon these two solid foundations, feeling confident that whilst ever acting under the inspiration of Faith and filial love, it would be easy to know when to yield and when combat, according to the occasion. I did not deceive myself. I was fully aware that it was signing the act of my own immolation, it was changing the course of my life, to renounce those happy school-days which I saw flowing so gently and joyously for all my companions. However, I strove not to give way to useless regrets. I endeavored to realize, on the contrary, that my being called so early to the path of sacrifice, was an especial mark of God's favor; and I was surprised myself to see that

having introduced order, determination and abnegation into my soul, they were followed by peace.

“Next day, my father came for me. My sorrow at leaving this dear place, the good Mothers and all my companions, joined to the fears that had constantly pursued me since my conversation with Mme. de Lussieu, were plainly visible in my face. The first words my father uttered were, ‘Gracious! how pale you are!’

• “He then added somewhat bitterly:

“‘Are you so grieved at the thought of returning to your father’s house?’

“‘No, father,’ I replied, ‘but when on the point of leaving a place so dear to me as this, and friends from whom I have received every mark of affection, I cannot entirely control my feelings; and were I to appear unmoved, you, dear father, would be the first to reproach me for my indifference. But I do not regret going with you, and I should also say that for some time past, I have been awaiting your permission to return to the paternal roof.’

“‘True,’ murmured my father, ‘you are now nineteen years old. Probably, I ought to have recalled you sooner.’

“I made no reply, tears choked my utterance, but by a violent effort I restrained them. Embracing all the religious present, several of whom

wept, having no need like myself to repress their feelings, I then asked if I might go to the infirmary to bid good-bye to one of the scholars there, a little girl about eleven years old, who was greatly attached to me. My father drew out his watch and looking at it said,

“‘I am going to be behind time.’

“I felt that I must now enter upon the new path I had traced out. Taking off my neck a medallion which my aunt had given me and which enclosed a flower of the Holy Balsam.

“‘Please, Madame,’ said I, to Mme. de Lus-sieu, ‘give this to Cecile for me. I have not time now to take it to her myself, and I am anxious to leave her this last proof of affection.’

“In receiving the medallion, the Superioress pressed my hand; I saw that she had understood me. I took my seat in the carriage, my father informed the Superioress that he would send for my baggage on the morrow, the vehicle started, I made a last sign of adieu, and one portion of my life, no doubt the happiest, was now mingled with the past.

“When we arrived, my stepmother was in the drawing-room, it being one of her reception days. I was not sorry, and asked to be conducted to my own apartment. My father having gone to his office, I remained alone. I spent a long time looking at the various objects around me, nearly

all of which recalled some dear remembrances. At last dinner was announced. I hastened to descend. The welcome my stepmother gave me seemed rather cool though polite. That evening she was to go to a ball. The conversation touched upon indifferent topics only, and being fatigued, I asked permission to retire quite early.

“Next morning before breakfast, my father called me to his room and handing me a pocket-book, said, ‘Renée, since you are now nineteen years of age, you are entitled to your revenues. They amount to thirty-five thousand francs. From this sum, I have had to deduct thirteen thousand francs for your expenses at the Sacred Heart convent, together with the maintenance of your property and some improvements on one of your estates. There remains the sum of twenty-two thousand francs ; here it is, my child.’

“I was speechless from astonishment. In my ignorance of the law, I was of the opinion that I could not touch my income until coming of age. And I, who for the last two days had been pondering so many questions, now suddenly found myself confronting one of the most delicate.

“‘What is the matter?’ inquired my father, ‘you have nothing to say.’

“‘I am overcome with surprise,’ said I, embracing him. ‘How little I dreamed of having all this money fall in my hands ! Would it not be

agreeable to you, dear father, to keep these twenty thousand francs? Pardon—'

" 'Oh no,' he answered with a smile which meant thanks, 'I have no need of borrowing from my little Renée. My affairs are in a very flourishing condition. Dispose, then, of your income as you choose, my daughter.'

" 'But,' said I, 'if you wish me to enjoy my revenues, it is necessary that you allow me to bear a portion of the expenses of a household of which I now form a part.' My father shrugged his shoulders as he answered,

" 'I am rich, there is no need whatever for my child paying me board.'

" 'Yes,' I insisted, 'out of courtesy to Mme. Vangaramenghen.'

" He reflected a moment, then as if undecided, said, 'Well, talk the matter over with my wife; and if I consent to this, Renée, it is only to put you at your ease, and to prevent your exceeding the regular terms for board by an excessive generosity.'

" He embraced me tenderly, and I returned to my chamber, bearing my little treasure, and with a very joyful heart. My father had shown so much delicacy, so much affection for me, he was so truly disposed to make my position in his house an agreeable one. And moreover, I held in my hands twenty-two thousand francs! Think, dear

Madame, you who live only to make others happy, think what pleasant dreams coursed through my brain! At breakfast the happiness I felt was so visible in my face, that my little brother said,

“‘Oh! how pleased you seem this morning! Will you not go out walking with us?’

“‘Yes,’ I answered, ‘and I am going to buy you a pretty toy.’

“He clapped his hands and ran off to bring his little sister, who darted up to me to obtain in turn her promise of a present. Taking hold of my hands, they both frolicked around me. Their joy, the satisfaction imprinted upon my father’s face, the cold but perfect politeness of my step-mother, all appeared to argue well for my future. My fears were stilled, and I experienced a hope of happiness in living amongst them.

As soon as breakfast was over, I requested Mme. Vangaramenghen to give me a few moments’ conversation.

“‘I am much pressed for time,’ was her answer, ‘I have but an hour in which to dress and get to the park.’

“As briefly as possible I informed her of what had passed between my father and myself,—that he had just remitted to me a sum of money, and that at my request, he would allow me to contribute towards the expenses of the house, and I now begged her to name the amount.

“‘How much did your father give you?’ she asked.

“Madame, have you not often experienced sudden and strange impressions, that in reality have the force of revelations, a very simple and trifling thing imparting to us in some inexplicable and mysterious manner, and in a moment, flashes of knowledge most wonderful? We look at a countenance, and feel instantly that the individual is in sympathy with ourselves, or, we hear a word which makes us tremble, we know not why. This simple and very natural question of my stepmother, sent a shock through my frame. ‘What matters that,’ I answered, ‘just tell me candidly how much you wish me to give.’

“Sinking back in the easy-chair on which she was seated, she fixed a searching gaze upon my face and said,

“‘What is your exact age?’

“‘Nineteen.’

“‘Since when?’

“‘Three days ago.’

“A smile played around her lips as she murmured,

“‘I understand.’

“With her elbows resting upon the arms of the easy-chair, her head thrown back and her hands clasped, she seemed plunged in thought, utterly forgetful of dress or promenade. She

had the air of a person absorbed in very perplexing calculations. I remained perfectly quiet, not daring to interrupt her, but wondering how so simple a question could have set in motion all this train of thought. At length, in about a quarter of an hour, she said to me,

“‘I do not see how your father can accept board of you.’

“‘He himself does not accept it, but he permits me however to offer it to you ;’ I replied, in a firm voice, ‘he desires you to fix the amount, and I avail myself of his permission to confer with you on the subject.’

“Smiling and shaking her head, she said,

“‘Well, let it be a thousand francs a year.’

“‘A thousand francs! You must be dreaming, Madame. Such a sum is entirely too little. Permit me to make it five times as much.’

“‘No, no,’ was her hasty rejoinder. ‘I have said a thousand francs and let it be thus. Do not insist upon your father’s giving his house the character of a hotel.’

“‘Ah ! Madame!’ I exclaimed.

“My face burnt and in spite of me, tears mounted to my eyes.

“‘Do not get angry,’ said Mme. Vangaramenghen, ‘How very sensitive you are!’

“‘I beg pardon,’ was my answer, in a voice as calm as possible. ‘I had no idea that my words

would have received such an interpretation. Let the matter stand as you have arranged it ; I give you a thousand francs per annum.'

"She arose and was about to ring the bell for her maid to assist her in dressing, when I stopped her by a gesture.

" 'One word more,' said I, 'I wish to consult you on another subject, ere taking any steps in the matter. I should be very grateful if you would allow me add one more servant to the household, a maid for my especial service.'

"At this my stepmother's eyes, for a moment, resumed their former vague expression which promptly changed to one of decision.

" 'No,' said she, 'my house is already organized, and I am opposed to increasing the number of domestics. I will let one of my women wait on you as well as on myself. I will consider this matter, and after deciding which one to allow you, I will send her to take your orders. Since you insist upon a regular arrangement of these details pecuniarily, you will please settle two-thirds of her wages.'

"I thanked her and left her presence, my heart chilled by a nameless fear. And yet I could not say that she was utterly cold or indifferent to those around her. She well knew how, when she wished, to smile with a charm inexpressible, and to converse so agreeably as to captivate all

who saw or heard her. Such had she shown herself to me during my visits to the paternal roof. On these occasions, I could not help comparing her to a fairy, playing the part of a grand lady. True, she had not won my love, but I certainly had admired her very much. And, now, since my life had become allied to her own, since it had become necessary to discuss with her these ordinary and homely subjects, to descend to domestic details, I felt that she awakened in me a feeling of defiance that utterly barred the door to sympathy. Now, I understood perfectly those vague, anxious fears of my aunt and Mme. de Lussieu.

“I ascended to my room, pursued by this one thought, Why has she put my board at so low a figure? The unjust and galling words she had dared use towards me, were to my mind most convincing proof that she had very little tenderness or generosity. Moreover, I was deeply hurt at her refusing to allow me the privilege of selecting my own maid. I felt that she had determined to hold me in perpetual check. The two thoughts which had already consoled me, now came to my aid, God will sustain me and my father loves me.”

Here Renée interrupted her narrative, exclaiming with a sigh: “How late it is already! I must return to the Jesuit church in a very short time. I intended to be brief, and yet, in spite of

me, my feelings so long pent up, would not be restrained."

"Speak, speak, Renée, keep back nothing," said the Marquise, pressing her hand. "You have time to talk with your old friends. You seek my advice; hence, fear not to give me all the details that I may be enlightened."

"No," answered Renée sadly. "I have still too much to learn of you for me to take time to continue this detailed account. The hour warns me that I must abridge somewhat."

She continued:

"I have already told you that I repaired to my room, smarting under a sense of wrong and filled with painful forebodings. In about an hour the waiting-maid assigned me appeared. She was a Flemish woman. My stepmother, born at Oudenarde, as you probably know, could talk to her in my presence without my understanding a word of what they said. Moreover, the dress and behavior of this maid the evening previous had shocked me, and that very morning, I had met her coming from the clothes-room with a suspicious looking pamphlet in her hand. Mme. de Lussieu's words, 'You will probably find yourself in embarrassing circumstances, requiring much tact and delicacy as to the manner in which you should act,' immediately came to my mind. And my heart revolted at the idea of the realization of these words,

in thus having constantly about me and in my especial service, one of the persons best calculated to verify them, though in a secondary manner, as it were.

“That evening, Mme. Vangaramenghen made known our arrangements to my father and they received his approval. She now complained that she was taking cold, and would not go out as she had intended to the Italian opera. My father proposed taking me, but I was spared the trouble of declining, for ere I could say a word, Madame replied that I was not in the habit of sitting up late, that I seemed a little fatigued, and that if she were not there to take care of me I would run the risk of catching cold from draughts. Consequently, my father went alone.

“I had been in my chamber about half an hour when there was a rap at the door, and I was very much surprised at seeing my stepmother enter. I offered her an easy-chair. She thanked me, and giving me one of those caressing looks she could so well assume when it suited her purpose, she said:

“‘Probably you were going to retire early, I fear that I have disturbed you.’

“I made a great effort to receive her courteously, assuring her that I was at her service.

“‘I have but a few words to say,’ she continued, ‘I come to beg a slight favor of you.’

“‘You may rely upon me.’

“‘I did not doubt it.’

“She now took my hand in hers. This show of tenderness was as little pleasing to me as the frigidity of her demeanor in our morning’s conversation. ‘I shall not receive for a week,’ said she, ‘the money which your father gives me for my dress and the children’s, and I have come to beg of you the loan of a sum sufficient to cancel this note, which I have promised shall be done to-morrow morning.’

“‘You shall willingly have it, if in my power,’ I answered. I felt my countenance change. It seemed as if the ground trembled under my feet.

“‘Here is the amount,’ said my stepmother, taking from an account book a leaf on which appeared the name of one of our most fashionable dress-makers. Taking the note, I glanced at the sum total.

“‘Seventeen thousand francs! I exclaimed.

“‘Yes. Does the amount surprise you,’ said my stepmother with a low, silvery laugh. ‘Ah! my poor child, it is very easily seen that you are just from boarding school.’

“I was positively speechless from astonishment.

“‘You see how it is,’ she continued. ‘I do not wish to risk displeasing your father by asking him to advance me, even by a week, the necessary sum. Never since our marriage has there been

the slightest cloud between us; and although it costs me much to request this favor of you, I am ready to do anything rather than incur, for the first time, the displeasure of my dear Adrien, whose happiness is the paramount consideration of life with me!’

“These words immediately banished my hesitation. Opening my secretary, I placed in her hands the seventeen thousand francs.

“‘You solemnly promise to keep this a secret?’ said she.

“‘Yes, Madame, was my answer in a stifled voice, ‘my father’s happiness is likewise dear to me.’

“‘Thank you, Renée,’ said she, with a kiss that made me shudder.

“She left the room, and I went to bed, but sleep had forsaken my eyelids. I mentally weighed all that had taken place during these two days I had lived under the paternal roof, and also, all that I knew of Mme. Vangaramenghen’s past. Several times, I had heard my aunt recount the manner of my father’s making his second wife’s acquaintance. He had been a widower three years, and it was whilst still feeling keenly his grief and isolation that he met at Spa this young and pretty woman, the daughter of a great manufacturer of Oudenarde. Endowed with all worldly graces she soon succeeded in

captivating my father's heart, and overcoming the repugnance he had hitherto manifested for a second marriage. She was rich, and my father in marrying her, expected her dowry to assist him in undertaking financial speculations of great magnitude. But six months after the marriage, this dowry still unpaid was swallowed up in the ruin of the Oudenarde manufacturer. It might very reasonably be suspected that at the time of my father's marriage or even engagement, her pecuniary affairs, though unknown to him, were then on the eve of a crash. However, he would not doubt the honor of her who had received his name. Forced to continue with no resources but his own, the speculations already undertaken, his position was a terrible one. It was at this time his hair turned white. Fortunately, he was extricated from his embarrassment by an unexpected rise in the price of some stocks he held. He issued victorious from the struggle, and since then his affairs have always prospered. But to be brief, he had suffered for this woman, he had borne uncomplainingly the weight of her financial ruin (no slight one to him); she knew it, and now I saw her squander in secret, deceiving him, the gold his generosity lavished upon her. I now clearly understood why she had fixed my board at so low a figure, it was only to have a better hold upon me in obtaining money for expendi-

tures concealed from him. I was indignant at such deceit! Had I not done wrong, in granting her request so readily? Yet, on the other hand, ought I not to do all in my power to ward off anything like annoyance or unhappiness in my father's house? Oh! to be alone and inexperienced, cope with such perplexities! . . . I felt feverish, my head was burning, and when morning came, I found myself unable to rise.

"I sent word to my father that I had a severe headache. Every attention was bestowed upon me, but I refused all remedies, knowing that no one could offer that which alone could relieve it.

"In the evening I felt better. My father said to me, 'You never told me, Renée, that you were subject to these spells. If you are troubled again in this way, I must see to it and consult the doctor.'

"Poor father! I did not undeceive him.

"The next morning passed without any occurrence worthy of notice; but in the evening, just as I entered the dining-room, I heard my father say,

" 'They are charming people, truly refined and elegant'—And the voice of my stepmother, I also heard very distinctly as she replied,

" 'And yet you wish me to take her there, poor child, with her school girl tastes and convent manners!'

"My entrance put an end to this dialogue.

"On returning to my room, I surveyed myself in the glass. What does she mean? thought I. I have known many persons quite her equal in elegance and worldly accomplishments, and they never considered me a fit subject for such remarks.

"I now scrutinized my apparel and was forced to acknowledge that it was very simple.

"I shall make some improvements on this point, said I to myself. I do not wish my father to be mortified by having my appearance so plain as to be at variance with his standard of elegance.

"The next day was Sunday. Accompanied, to my great disgust, by the Flemish maid, I went to church quite early and there seeking refuge in the first confessional, I imbibed strength and consolation from the good priest's counsels. I now heard Mass and received Holy Communion.

"On reaching home I found my father on his way to the parlor to read the journals.

"'What!' said he, 'have you been out already.'

"'Yes, father, it is Sunday.'

"'But there are Masses in Paris until one o'clock. You ought to have informed yourself of this.'

"'I did know it, but father, I went early to receive Our Lord, expressly for the purpose of begging His blessing on you.'

"A look of mingled surprise and emotion passed over my father's face, as he murmured, 'Thank you, my child,' and embraced me affectionately.

"At breakfast, I perceived that my step-mother had just risen. She was still in her wrapper, though it was past one o'clock when we left the table. A last hope remained to me.

"She is probably not well, taking a cold and unable to go out, thought I.

"When I found myself alone with the children, taking the little girl upon my knee,

" 'Odile,' said I, 'do you never go to Mass?'

"She began to laugh.

" 'To Mass? Oh! no, big sister, I would rather go to the Tuileries.'

"My little brother who had heard the question, ran to me, saying,

" 'I have been to Mass once. Oh! it is so funny to see all the people bow their heads.'

"The little girl now felt quite interested in the subject.

" 'Then I want to go, too,' she exclaimed. 'And if mamma will not take me, I will go with nurse.'

" 'Does your mamma refuse to take you?' said I, pushing my inquiries.

" 'She never goes herself,' answered little Paul, 'she always goes to the park.'

“Madame, I cannot tell you the impression this revelation made upon me. By the side of these two innocent victims of their mother’s impiety, arose up before me the image of my father, abandoned to the influence of this unscrupulous woman. Lifting the child off my knee, I ran to my chamber and burst out crying. Only that morning had I begged God to render my father eternally happy, and it seemed to me as if I had just received a revelation. I now promised God to be the guardian of this happiness, to struggle incessantly against every evil threatening my dear father, and especially that most terrible one of religious indifference to which he had already succumbed.

“My stepmother’s words, so full of disdainful pity were ever before me. On Monday morning, I repaired to the Louvre and made the purchase of some tasteful and elegant articles of dress. We had invited company to dine with us that evening. My hair was arranged in a becoming manner and unusual pains were bestowed upon my toilette, which derived not a little adornment from the jewels descended to me from my mother.

“As I entered the parlor where the guests were assembled, my father’s and stepmother’s looks were equal to an exclamation.

“My only object had been to appear in keeping with my position and surroundings, but

unconsciously, I had surpassed my limits, and thus trenched upon two different varieties of self-love. My father was delighted, and presented me to each of his guests, saying: 'This is my eldest daughter,' in such accents of joyful pride as thrilled my heart. Mme. Vangaramenghen was pale, her lips compressed, and the glances which she, from time to time, cast upon me, were angry scowls. At first, I felt confused and almost sorry, for I remembered these words of Mme. de Lussien: 'Guard against the seductions of vanity.' I felt that these seductions had presented themselves, and for a few moments, I was completely silent. But, perceiving that having eclipsed Mme. Vangaramenghen I had already vanquished her, I determined to raise my heart above the miserable pleasures of worldly vanity or triumphant defiance, and to conduct myself with equal modesty and ease. Since the occasion offered, I wished my father to see that a Christian woman needs be in no wise the inferior of an irreligious one, even in those accomplishments and charms that please the world, and which God does not forbid when regulated within just limits.

"I succeeded, it appears, for that evening Mme. Paulus said to my father:

"My dear Sir, I consider you one of the most favored fathers on the face of the globe.'

“And his answer as he kissed her hand was,

“‘I should like to say that you are very kind; and yet I am truly delighted to believe that your remarks are no exaggeration.’

“My stepmother immediately arose and seated herself at the piano. As no one had asked me to play, I was pleased to listen and applaud.

“Mme. Vangaramenghen could scarcely restrain her wrath. Next day she said to me :

“‘Ah ! if your religious could only see you !’

“‘And suppose they could,’ was my answer. ‘What have I done wrong?’

“‘Oh ! nothing,’ she replied. ‘I mean merely that you have emancipated yourself very speedily and willingly.’

“From this moment there was an indefinable spirit of hostility or something akin to it between us. You know how we feel in the atmosphere the approach of a storm. Such were my impressions in regard to my domestic atmosphere. I was fully convinced that, in spite of all my efforts to the contrary, the storm was brewing and it must burst upon us, sooner or later.

“It came a little sooner than I had expected. The following Friday my father had invited company to breakfast, two bankers, to whom he wished to show particular attention. I tried to inform myself of the bill of fare, so as to take all necessary precautions against encroaching upon the

precept of abstinence ; but in some manner, either on purpose or through a mistake, I was deceived. The breakfast was composed almost entirely either of meat dishes or food dressed in such a way that I could not conscientiously partake of it. Declining the proffered meats, I told the waiter in an undertone to prepare me some eggs. My stepmother whose ears were on the alert, heard the order and said aloud,

“ ‘This is the first time we have ever received such an affront at our table.’

“That woman is artifice itself. I confess myself unable to follow her on such ground. I see clearly through all her cunning, but know not how to baffle it. The accent with which she pronounced the *we* did not escape my notice. Her object was to enroll my father on the list of the offended, by making him feel that I had likewise offered him an insult. Mortified at what had taken place before these two strange gentlemen, he cast upon me a look of exceeding displeasure. I struggled bravely against my tears, and managed to eat the egg I had asked for, my stepmother meanwhile launching at me some very cutting words.

“My only answer was,

“ ‘I greatly regret, Madame, not being able to conform to your desires.’

“After breakfast, my father took the gentle-

men to his cabinet, thus leaving my stepmother and myself face to face.

"She said to me sharply,

" 'Mademoiselle, I beg you, never again to attempt giving me lessons in public.'

"With folded hands and in as calm, steady a voice as possible, I replied,

"Madame, I have never thought of giving you lessons; I only complied with my duty. I am not free to violate my conscience, and you were perfectly so to have ordered other dishes.'

"Not wishing to continue the discussion, I sought my own room. Two hours later my father sent for me. I suppose Mme. Vangaramenghen had been endeavoring to irritate him against me, for as I descended the stairs I heard her say,

" 'Ah! my poor dear, you have not reached the end by a great deal.'

"Then the cabinet door was closed, and on entering, I found my father alone.

"He looked very angry, but seeing traces of tears on my cheeks, he seemed touched, and merely shrugging his shoulders, said,

" 'Why could you not, just for once, have done as others did?'

" 'Father,' I replied, 'suppose some one should suggest to me that for once only I deeply offend you, what ought my answer to be?'

"Madame, I cannot describe the great change

these simple words produced in him. He looked fixedly at me and then turned abruptly towards his desk. It was evident that he was much affected and wished to conceal it from me. In a moment, he said, affectionately,

“ ‘ You see, my wife never thought of it in that light, it being so at variance with our ways. But rest easy, my child, this morning’s occurrence shall not be renewed. Hereafter, I will give the orders to the housekeeper myself.’

“ I threw myself into his arms and burst into tears.

“ ‘ What is the matter?’ he exclaimed.

“ ‘ Oh! I am so happy!’

“ ‘ Ah!’ said he, laughing, ‘ if you weep for joy it is all right.’

“ And this was how the first struggle terminated. I thanked God with all my heart for this happy ending of it, but you may easily imagine my step-mother’s irritation.

“ Henceforth, it was evident that the house contained two opposing parties. Every day witnessed a conflict more or less important. It became necessary for me to decline going to the parlor when my father was not there. In his presence, everything was conducted with decorum, manners and conversations were irreproachable; but during his absence, one observed a great difference in the behavior of some visitors. Hence,

it became necessary for me to decline the invitations of certain persons and to hold myself aloof from them. Dear Madame, how deceiving is that golden veil thrown over what is called worldly society, that brilliant, haughty throng surrounding us, composed of persons identified with our families and calling themselves our friends ! Ah ! when the veil is rent asunder or even raised a little ! . . . The meaning of much that took place in my father's absence I did not entirely comprehend, but I understood enough to convince me that it was my duty to be very reserved and distant with many who visited our house.

“ How often I thought of you ! But I supposed you were in the country, and writing to you presented many difficulties. In my visits to the Sacred Heart Convent I was always accompanied by my father, and neither Mme. de Lussieu nor myself dared ask the favor of a confidential conversation. In my daily promenades, I was ever followed by the Flemish maid whose prudence was not to be relied upon.

“ And this is the life I have lead for the last six months, such the chain I have borne at Paris, Vichy and even upon my own estate in Touraine, where we spent nearly two months.”

“ Poor child ! dear little martyr ! ” exclaimed the Marquise, clasping the young girl in her arms. Renée raised her finger towards the time-piece's

flowery hands ever advancing in their course, and said,

“I must hasten to finish ; I have abridged much and yet the hour frightens me. When my step-mother saw that the household treated me with great respect, and my father willingly heard all I had to say, she changed her tactics. Cunning and ruse having proved unsuccessful, she now had recourse to direct assault. As soon as my father returned from the bank she would run to him bathed in tears, and lay before him a list of complaints against me. The most trifling matters,—matters in which I had not the faintest idea of offending her, thus became material for recrimination. She always ended by saying, ‘We were so happy before Renée came.’

‘ Gradually, this course of conduct gained its end ; persistent complaint by wearying my father and breaking down his patience, succeeded where false reasoning had failed. To irritation against his wife, which only increased her fits of crying and nervous excitement, followed regrets for the happy past when his home was the abode of peace. And this he sometimes made me feel. But very few words would have been necessary for me to have revenged myself for all these wrongs upon the cunning author of them, for of the seventeen thousand francs borrowed for only eight days, not a syllable had been heard ; and I

learned from the children that their mother had very recently bought a pearl necklace. But I had pledged myself to secrecy, and consequently, banished as unworthy of me, all thoughts of disclosure. This my stepmother knew, or she had never dared treat me as she did,—me, who possessed so powerful a weapon against her. Other motives besides my promise concurred in sealing my lips,—thoughts of my father's grief and mortification, his unsuppressed anger, the discord and mistrust that would long afterwards reign over his home were this miserable transaction made known to him,—all, I assure you, confirmed me in the resolution of making every sacrifice to spare him the painful knowledge forever.

“Meanwhile, harassed and tormented incessantly he had several times expressed the wish to have me married. My stepmother was delighted at this idea, whilst I heard it with a shudder. If it be sad to suffer under the paternal roof, how isolated and bitter the lot of a woman whose own fireside lacks the proper foundation of domestic happiness! Often had I examined my soul before God, and fully recognized my vocation for the world and the duties of the married state. But marriage presented itself to my mind as the union of two hearts, penetrated with mutual confidence and tenderness, sharing the same faith, the same hopes, and assisting each other on the heaven-

ward journey. I saw with misgivings and fright that my father's choice of a spouse for me would not be greatly influenced by such motives as these.

"This momentous question would probably have remained in suspense until next spring, had it not suddenly been precipitated by a very unexpected occurrence.

"A fortnight ago an event which took place (too long to relate to you in detail), forced me unwillingly into a fierce struggle with my step-mother, and my father into the position of sustaining me. It related to the observance of Sunday. This incident suddenly decided our departure from Touraine. My father and myself arriving the last of the family in Paris, there found Mme. Vangaramenghen in such a state of exasperation, that pushed to extremities, he declared his intention of having me marry without delay. He announced his determination to such of his friends as he chanced to meet at this time in Paris, hoping thus to aid the cause.

"Alas! he succeeded but too well. At the end of six days, he received a letter from a banker of Antwerp, asking my hand for his eldest son. This banker happened to be one of the very guests before whom I had refused to violate the precept of Friday's abstinence. We had met the son at Vichy, quite a handsome young man,

possessing many worldly advantages, such as distinguished family, great fortune and a brilliant future, for the father intended resigning to him the directorship of their banking house. In addition to all these considerations was the tone of the letter asking my hand; it was couched in terms most respectful and even very flattering to me.

“My father with a gesture of joy, exclaimed, ‘This exceeds my expectations. Renée, you are betrothed.’

“We were alone. He handed me the letter. I ran over it, and finally my eyes rested upon the date which followed the signature. It seemed to me that an iron hand was thrust in my face, my head swam, I extended my clenched hands which happily met those of my father, for I was on the point of falling.

“‘Good heavens!’ he exclaimed, ‘what is the matter?’

“And in a voice scarcely articulate, I replied, “‘I refuse the offer.’

“These words exasperated him to such a degree that the very remembrance of it still sends a thrill through me. He became pale as marble. Whilst I fell back in the easy-chair on the verge of a swoon, he stood before me, silent and motionless, his arms crossed, his eyes gleaming. At length, making an effort to recover his com-

posure, he said, 'Will you please explain yourself?'

" 'Explain myself! Poor father! to him more than to any other was I unwilling to reveal the cause of my decision. During the few happy moments I had been able to spend alone with him since leaving school, how much that was culpable in the sight of God had I not discovered in him, how many false notions, errors, prejudices concerning the requirements of our holy religion! Alas! I am forced to confess that dazzled and misled by this woman whom he so blindly loved, faith was already very weak in his soul and the momentous question of eternity had become to him one of slight account. And it was I alone who must counteract this deplorable influence, I who must let fall, drop by drop upon this heart not entirely callous, the truths which slowly and almost imperceptibly would restore its healthy activity. If I left him, it was equivalent to renouncing forever all hope of leading my father back to the path whence he had wandered. How many times had I not promised myself to be faithful in this duty, despite all obstacles! My father's reproaches could pain me, but my faith and my heart spoke louder than his wrath.

"I said in reply to his question,

" 'I do not wish to marry a foreigner.

" 'What nonsense!' was his answer, with a ges-

ture of contempt. 'It has not been six months since you were shut up within the four walls of a convent, and behold, now you are about to ruin your future just because of your partiality for such or such a country!'

"He commenced to stride rapidly up and down the floor, then suddenly turned towards me and said,

" 'You must give up this foolish notion.'

" 'No, never,' was my answer.

"The manner in which I pronounced these words probably lent weight to them, for my father again stood motionless before me. At last he said,

" 'You will go to your room and remain there until noon to-morrow, when you will give me a decided answer. If you persist in your refusal to comply with my most earnest wishes ' (and he emphasized these words), 'that you accept this offer and get married in a few weeks, you will have no one but yourself to blame if you are constrained to accept a much less advantageous offer.'

"Inclining my head respectfully, I arose, quivering with emotion.

"At noon, next day, I sought my father's presence.

" 'Well, what is your decision?' said he.

" 'Ah! pray,' I exclaimed, 'do not ask me to expatriate myself!'

" 'So I shall have to reply that even the most

serious considerations in addition to a father's earnestly expressed desires, have not been able to prevail over your fondness for the gayeties of Paris.'

"And he added in a freezing tone,

"I am not yet thoroughly acquainted with your disposition, and I question whether I have not been too slow in believing that more than once others have been the sufferers by it.'

"Oh! how these words pierced my heart! to think that my father inclined towards my accuser, and even regretted having been just to me, when I, for love of him, was practicing the utmost self-denial!"

Tears rolled down the cheeks of the Marquise.

Renée continued,

"At breakfast, Mme. Vangaramenghen had not the delicacy to forego allusion to the subject of dispute between my father and myself. Displeased at the decision which retarded my departure from the house, and greatly gratified at the same time to find my father so irritated against me, she tormented me for more than half an hour, by dwelling in detail upon all the advantages which I had thus cast aside. This, in my father's presence was adding fuel to the flames. But just as we were leaving the table, the servant announced a visitor, the Baroness de Grenaff, one of my stepmother's most intimate friends, who

was in the habit of calling upon us in this unceremonious and familiar manner. My stepmother joined her in the drawing room, and, of course, gave her a full account of the storm in our domestic atmosphere, for, an hour later, my father sent for me. His countenance had lost its wrathful expression.

“ ‘Well,’ said he, ‘you have another aspirant for your hand, but one who is far from presenting the advantages of the former. Mme. de Grenaff has a nephew about twenty-four years old, very good looking, of fine address and perfectly educated. His usual abode is in the country of which he is very fond, his tastes inclining him to a quiet, rural life. He occasionally comes to Paris, where he enjoys the advantages of the best society, to which he is entitled by his birth and connections. He has no fortune. Mme. de Grenaff told my wife, that struck by the great similarity of your tastes and his, your disposition and his, she had often thought how congenial a match it would be, but his lack of fortune had ever been a barrier to any expression of her views to us. Now, however, emboldened by recent circumstances, she has just mentioned the subject. As for my part, I willingly waive all objections to your marriage with a man lacking fortune; but, I am not sure that you will so easily overcome the difficulties and privations of

the position in which you will have put yourself.'

" 'I set no great stress on money,' I murmured, in reply.

" 'Well, then, I shall write to several persons on the subject, whose address Mme. de Grenaff has given me, and if their answers be such as I wish, I shall invite the Baroness to introduce her nephew to us.'

" 'I could barely utter a feeble 'yes,' the sound of which made me shudder, for it seemed to me that by this word of acquiescence, although it was still involved in many contingencies, I had just sealed my fate. My father embraced me, saying,

" 'Do not be so frightened, I will not pledge my word or yours until we see M. de Montpollin.'

"The desired information came promptly to hand. My father gave the letters to me for my perusal. They were all strikingly alike, extolling the young man's intelligence, and good character, and dwelling especially upon his superior education. The words 'courtesy, exquisite manners' met my eye at every turn. This is all I know of him."

"And this is something," said the Marquise. "Ordinarily, great delicacy in conduct and externals supposes a little of the same delicacy in the

heart. However, the expression 'superior education' is very differently interpreted at the present day from what it used to be."

"Alas! it is what I think," sighed the young girl. "And yet, to-morrow witnesses my betrothal to this man, an utter stranger to me, for according to the description of him, his appearance cannot be such as would induce me to repel the alliance at first sight of him."

And suddenly bursting into tears, Renée exclaimed, "Oh! what a marriage! what a marriage! If I could only fly from it and take refuge at the Sacred Heart or in my château!"

She closed her eyes a moment as if overwhelmed and added,

"Providence in Whom I trust will not abandon me."

"Do not doubt it, my poor child," said Mme. de Valbret.

"Yes," answered Renée, "I already regard as a favor from heaven that this interview so decisive in its bearing upon my whole future life, is to take place, at your house and under your eyes."

"At my house? under my eyes? what do you mean, my child?"

"What!" exclaimed Renée with unfeigned astonishment, "do you not know that this even-

ing at your house we are to meet Mme. de Grenaff and this M. de Montpollin?"

"Ah! yes, my child," said the Marquise, "thanks to Mme. de Broz for this. She persuaded me to consent to receiving Mme. de Grenaff and a relative of the latter whose name I did not even ask. But I did not know that she had also sent an invitation to your family. Is she aware that this young man seeks an introduction to you?"

"No, certainly not. Mme. de Grenaff and my father wished to take advantage of an accidental meeting."

"Mme. de Broz is acquainted with you then?"

"Oh! very well. Mme. de Broz is a distant relative of my father. They have always kept up a friendly intercourse, and when Mme. de Broz passes through Paris on her way to the paternal abode, she stops and has a little music with Mme. de Vangaramenghen and myself."

"That explains all."

"I did not know until recently that she was your niece. It was only through this invitation received to-day that I learned the fact of your return to Paris. To profit by it and snatch a chance to see you, I availed myself of the presence in Paris of one of my cousins from Belgium, for it was not in the midst of a brilliant assemblage I wished first to meet you. It must be alone, that we

might speak of the joyous past, and the redoubtable present, also, that I might open my heart to you."

"Ah! dear child, you have acted wisely in this."

"My cousin is to be trusted," continued Renée, "and will keep the secret. She accompanied me to the Jesuit chapel and is to return there for me. I must now leave you, dear Madame, for I am already behind time."

The Marquise rang her bell.

"Wait a moment, Renée," said she, "I am going to send some one with you."

"Oh! it is not necessary, the chapel is so near."

"Yes," replied Mme. de Valbret as the young Bressoise answered the summons, "here is my maid at your service."

And again folding the young girl in her arms, she said.

"Renée, thanks be to God for permitting me to watch a little over your future. Whatever you do or say, remember, (I ask you this in the name of our dear Fanny, my sister in affection and your second mother,) remember, on no account, to let yourself be surprised into a decisive answer, ere I have advised you what to say. This evening, I will make it my duty to have some private conversation with the young man, and my age

and experience will soon give me a good insight into his character, his habits, his disposition. As for you, intrench yourself behind these simple words, 'I will give you an answer to-morrow.' Good-bye, my beloved child, until the next few hours."

"I leave you," said Renée, "with a heart greatly relieved. Your words have lifted from it a weight that was stifling me. I am no longer alone in the midst of anguish, and, perhaps, danger. Now that your affection supports me therein, I hope."

Though her eyes were still moist with tears, a smile illumined her face as she left Mme. de Valbret.

CHAPTER VI.

A VISIT.

AMIDST a multiplicity of pressing cares, thrust upon us seemingly at once and apparently prejudicial to one another by reason of their equal claim upon our immediate attention, what is the best course to pursue, the greatest economy of time, the most advantageous management? It is assuredly to keep perfectly calm, and one by one, taking hold of each duty, quietly disentangle it from the mass, giving it our undivided attention, regardless of the others until this is finished, proceeding thus throughout. Even as along certain shores in what seems at first sight but a confusion of rocks, a ray of the sun discovers to us a clear, open path, so the light of order, reveals to a reflecting mind the sure, safe road leading from a labyrinth of perplexing cares to the happy accomplishing of them, the goal whither one anxiously directs his steps. Tranquil, regulated but ceaseless activity,—such is the aspect presented to us by the divine Workman's operations amidst the harmonious and ever shifting scenes of nature. It is also in the human mind the sign of

true liberty of spirit, of a ripe judgment, and a great regard (too rare indeed,) for that supreme wealth of Providence denominated time.

This art of regulating every hour of one's life is, in many instances, a special gift of God to a favored nature; but oftener, it is acquired. In living, that is to say, in seeing our illusions vanish, the soul grows stronger and learns wisdom, disengaging itself from a crowd of vain desires and rising above them. The soul is a land where storms from time to time, sweep away the unsightly rubbish that gentle winds are powerless to move. When thus cleared and prepared for its reception, order takes root in this land, and if allowed to grow freely, it soon produces most admirable flowers and fruits.

The Marquise de Valbret had always been deeply impressed with this truth. By frequent meditation, she had arrived at so clear a comprehension of the value of time and life's duties that she not only utilized every instant, but likewise knew how to derive from each the most abundant fruits. To be sure, this economic and conscientious distribution of the hour presupposes a great spirit of self-abnegation, for it gives no quarter either to caprice or to undue repose. However, work is not so onerous and void of interest as might at first thought appear, for peace of heart, the satisfaction of having wrought good, and the hope of

our eternal reward are all concealed under the somewhat rude exterior of sacrifice; and gradually, the fruits thus obtained become so sweet, that we forget the few thorns which pricked us in gathering them.

Mme. de Valbret was deeply affected at the touching recital to which she had just listened; moreover, she was much fatigued by the visits she had been making to some of her poor, living in a distant quarter of the city, where she often presented herself, very plainly attired, the better to gain their confidence, and also to conceal her identity, in accordance with the promptings of faith and humility. A few hours only would elapse ere arrayed in garments befitting her high lineage and station, she, the elegant and gracious hostess, would preside over the brilliant assemblage gathered within her drawing-rooms, from which ten illustrious generations had successively passed away, leaving to her, their last descendant, all their courtesy and dignity. Yet, she did not resume her seat, but merely bent her head upon her hand as if reflecting a moment. When surprised by Mlle. Vangaramenghen she was in a deep study, to which she immediately returned as soon left to herself again. Her plans were now encouraged by the reflection that trifling as it might be, an act of charity would draw down God's blessing upon the momentous question,

awaiting her decision that evening even as light vapors mount to heaven to fall again in refreshing dews.

At the end of a few minutes the Marquise arose murmuring,

“Yes, it is worth even more. By this means nothing will be concealed. Even in hearts nearest perfection, friendship is not always clear-sighted, and a glance at the home life of a family often reveals more than the longest accounts and descriptions. I ought not to let slip the opportunity of taking this step. If, as I have reason to fear, my efforts with my brother-in-law fail, I shall be the better enabled by this visit to know in what other channel to direct them, having judged for myself of this young man’s life and surroundings.”

Taking off her wrapper, the Marquise resumed the apparel she had laid aside on entering. She then rang the bell, and a servant appeared.

“Bring me immediately,” said she, “a little Malaga and some biscuit.”

“Oh!” exclaimed the old man wringing his hands, “Madame going back among her poor! It is so far, and night too!”

“Do not worry yourself thus, Pierre. I am not going far, only among some neighbors. Make haste and bring me the refreshments I have asked for.”

These words recalled the old man's accustomed promptness, for on seeing his mistress at this late hour resume the livery of charity, regret had almost paralyzed his activity. He soon reappeared bearing a decanter and some cakes, on a silver waiter emblazoned with the united arms of Valbret and Rocheguimier.

"Madame will dine later to-day?" he asked, or rather sighed.

"Indeed my good Pierre, I do not know if I shall dine at all."

"Madame not dine!"

Pierre's voice as he uttered these words was no longer a sigh but a groan.

"At all events," replied the Marquise, "I shall certainly be back before the arrival of Mme. de Broz. Tell Françoise to have ready for me the toilette which I have already designated."

She ate two biscuits, then took from her secretary the portfolio she had deposited there, and went out followed by old Pierre's wistful glances. "How dark it is!" she murmured, as she walked along. "I greatly regret it, as I should have preferred making this visit of observation in daylight."

Taking the Rue Velpeau, brilliantly illuminated by the dazzling reflection of the neighboring shop windows, she soon reached the Rue Babylone, certainly thus named by way of contrast, for this

street is too quiet to recall the famous city of ancient times, and its inhabitants too respectable and virtuous to merit the Biblical anathemas.

She had not very far to go ere reaching her destination. Partly by counting the houses, and partly by the faint light of a lamp, she distinguished the house marked number 20, and entered.

"M. Le Mahouet?" she inquired of the porter.

"He is out and will not be back before seven or eight o'clock."

"Is no one of the family at home?"

"His grandmother."

"On what floor?"

"The fourth floor, the door at the end."

"Thanks."

And not heeding the sigh which instinctively escaped her lips, she climbed the stairs. Gently pulling the seldom used bell cord at the room indicated, the door was opened and a woman's voice said,

"It is already finished, Monsieur."

At sight of the Marquise, the individual who spoke thus, stood a moment speechless in astonishment.

"M. Le Mahouet is out, it appears," said the visitor, who could distinguish in the shadow of

the door, only the head-dress of a Morbihan peasant.

The face enframed in the white aureole now advanced, and the Marquise judged it was that of a person about forty years of age.

"Yes, Madame," replied the servant, "Monsieur is at the Palais Royal."

"Could I see Madame, his grandmother, a moment?"

"I think so; come in, and I will inquire."

The Marquise now entered a vestibule lighted by a night-lamp. The walls were decorated with sketches of still-life in hard wood, at sight of which ornamentation of the humble abode, Mme. de Valbret could not repress a smile, for she immediately recognized herein the hand of Xavier de Bois Rougés, whose talent as an amateur in this line she had often encouraged.

In a moment, the servant reappeared, saying, "Will Madame please to follow me?"

Taking the lamp from the wall, she preceded Mme. de Valbret into the windings of the narrow labyrinth called a corridor. Finally, she drew aside the slide of a double door which evinced the care taken to ensure the comfort of the adjoining room.

"Whom shall I announce?" she inquired of Mme. de Valbret.

"Mme. Geoffroy," returned the latter, confining

herself in this instance as she did when visiting the poor, to her husband's baptismal name.

She was ushered into a good sized room, comfortably heated. At one end of it, in a large easy-chair on rollers, was seated or rather extended a woman. Her feet, apparently paralyzed, rested upon a stool. One hand held a screen, and with the other, she protected her eyes suddenly dazzled by the light of the lamp from which the servant had just removed the shade.

Smiling, she said to the Marquise,

"Please excuse me, Madame, for not rising to receive you. You see that it is not the inclination to do so which is lacking."

"It is I who should offer you excuses, Madame," replied the Marquise, approaching the chair which the servant had advanced. "At this hour, it is not customary to receive other visitors than one's friends, and I greatly fear having been inconsiderate."

"Move the lamp, Anne Marie, it is blinding," interrupted the invalid.

"Oh! how unfortunate," said the Marquise to herself, "everything is going to be in twilight."

But happily, the Morbihannaise did not replace the shade on the lamp; she merely removed the latter to a high bracket behind the old lady, whose weak eyes were thus relieved of the glare,

without her features being concealed from the Marquise.

"You are not at all inconsiderate, Madame," replied the invalid. "You are as perfectly welcome at this hour as at any other. I regret only the not being able to give you a more courteous greeting. If I have understood aright it is Mme. Geoffroy to whom I have the honor of speaking?"

"One of your neighbors, Madame. I live in the Rue de Sevres, very near here."

"I congratulate myself at this," said the invalid, with a slight inclination.

"Madame," resumed the Marquise, "you see in me a debtor to M. de Mahouet, coming to present my warmest thanks, and, also, to make restitution."

At this last word, the old lady looked at the Marquise in profound surprise, and suddenly a shade of sorrow passed over her countenance.

"Madame, you have made a mistake," said she in a moment, "no one owes us anything."

"I beg your pardon."

"Do not insist—with me, at least," replied the invalid in a severe tone of voice. "I know that my family has no debtor. If you have had any business with my son of which I am ignorant, please wait a little and speak of it to him."

"I cannot wait until he returns."

‘Let us talk then of something else if you please.’ Saying these words, the invalid placed one hand upon the arm of her easy-chair, and the Marquise, noticing that it trembled as she did so, was filled with compassion. Mme. de Valbret understood at once that though the plain attire had concealed her fortune, the few words she had exchanged with the old lady and even her mode of salutation, had betrayed her education and rank, not so easily disguised from one, who like herself had evidently been accustomed to the utmost refinement. Those who are reared in an atmosphere of distinction and elegance, never fail to recognize these qualities in others, no matter under what disguise they may appear. Feeling this, the Marquise easily discerned in the emotion, awakened at sound of the word restitution the anxiety of a proud spirit asking itself what favor this woman, an utter stranger, meant to confer under the pretext of an obligation. She hastened to say:

“Allow me, Madame, at least, to tell you what it is I wish to return M. de Mahouet. It is an account book, a memorandum containing cards and notes. He left it this morning in an omnibus where I found it.”

A total change was now visible in the invalid’s countenance.

“Ah! Madame,” she exclaimed, “you have

really taken the trouble to bring it yourself, and so promptly! How grateful I am for your thoughtful kindness!"

Taking Mme. de Valbret's hand, she held it a long time in her own, saying by this expressive gesture, "Pardon me."

And the gentle smile of the Marquise replied, "Noble poverty, fear not."

"I should not have requested the honor of seeing you," resumed Mme. de Valbret, "had I desired only to return the memorandum, but I was anxious to express my gratitude to M. de Mahouet. Deprived of this pleasure, by his absence, I cannot forego that of congratulating you upon having a son so good, so respectful to the aged, so—"

"Ah! you are a mother!" interrupted the invalid with sparkling eyes. Raising hers to heaven the Marquise answered, gently,

"Yes."

"And Etienne then has been so fortunate as to render you a service?" inquired the invalid.

The Marquise now recounted the charitable assistance that M. de Mahouet had given her that morning.

"He did nothing but his duty," replied the old lady with evident delight. "I should be truly mortified did I imagine him capable of acting otherwise."

"Would that all were like him," said the Marquise, "but it must be confessed that the present generation is greatly degeneratd from the chivalry of our ancestors."

"A bad sign indeed!" returned the old lady, shaking her head. "During my long life, I have several times seen society in peril, and I have always remarked that a certain laxity in manners and etiquette either preceded or followed these sad periods. In my opinion, the disregard of etiquette springs from no good source."

"And I add that it produces no good results. One who treats others with proper respect, likewise respects himself. Is it not so?"

"Perfectly true," replied the invalid. "Ah! Madame, how very agreeable to me is this visit which you have been so kind as to honor me with! I assure you, that not for a long time, have I enjoyed so great a pleasure. Alas! I am prevented from repaying it, but since, as you tell me, only a short distance separates us, let me hope that, from time to time, you will favor me with your presence."

"Rest assured," said Mme. de Valbret, "that with your permission, I shall soon see you again."

A faint tap at the door interrupted them.

"Come in," said the old lady.

The Breton servant advanced, murmuring,

"Will not Madame take her soup?"

"Not now, presently, Anne Marie," was the invalid's reply, in the tone with which one repels an unexpected importunity.

"Oh! I beg of you," said Mme. de Valbret rising, "do not let my presence interfere in the least with your domestic arrangements. If it does, I am ready to leave immediately."

"Pray, Madame, be seated."

"If you will take your soup," replied the Marquise, resuming her seat.

In a moment the servant reappeared, bearing a very small silver tureen, containing the smoking soup. She now lit a taper and placed it on the mantel, so that her mistress might have sufficient light by which to eat, without being annoyed at the glare of the lamp.

Proffering profuse apologies to the Marquise, the invalid commenced to take her soup; and the former profited by this opportunity, and the additional light of the taper to scrutinize more closely her hostess and the surroundings.

The old lady must have been a remarkable beauty. The weight of years of sorrow and of bodily afflictions in bowing her tall form, wrinkling her broad brow and tracing heavy lines upon her still purely oval face had not been able to rob the nose of its aristocratic grace, the pale but unsunken lips of their gentle smile, nor to

dim the lustre of those large dark eyes full of animation, kindness and mind. Her hair, white as snow, and worn in simple bandeaux was covered by a cap of black lace, and a long woolen wrapper also black, enveloped a body visibly emaciated. From the manner in which she raised her head at times or extended her hand, likewise from her accent, one perceived vestiges of a habit of commanding,—that gentle dignified tone of command indicative of the Christian and the lady of quality. She had worn mourning a long time, and her lower limbs were completely paralyzed, yet her whole exterior bespoke that unruffled dignity and calmness which reveals the truest, the most difficult species of courage,—invincible patience.

That she might be spared the trouble of reaching out her hand to the mantel, a little stand at her right, bore a small workbasket, books and a crucifix around which were placed a statuette of Our Lady of Victory and several photographs. O touching inspiration of the heart! This aged mother deprived of her dear ones for a greater part of the day, must, at least, have their images before her; and to these she joins the souvenirs of the divine friends, faithful companions who aid her to bear the weight of trial, and lend an attentive ear to the incessant petitions of her heart, whether for the beloved ones still sur-

rounding her or those who have preceded her to eternity.

As she placed the lid of the soup tureen upon the stand, a ray of light falling upon it, revealed to the Marquise some characters engraved upon the shining surface. Was it a coat of arms or only a simple mark? She could not distinguish which it was, but two miniatures suspended from the mantel favored the former supposition. One of them represented a young woman in the court dress of the age of Louis XV.; the other was that of a gentleman proudly bearing his admiral's uniform. The lamp had already shown Mme. de Valbret at the end of the room, the full length portrait of an officer in uniform, but she had merely caught a glimpse of it.

Yielding more and more to the joyful influences to which her heart was so susceptible she thought,

"It is said that the diamond always retains its brilliancy, no matter what the setting; but I go farther, and hesitate not to say that the duller the metal, the more brilliant appears the diamond. Poverty has certainly taken up her abode with this family, and I feel that her presence has conferred upon them a dignity and virtues, the germs of which no doubt they possessed, but which never would have been developed except in adversity. God grant I may succeed

with my brother-in-law ! for now that I have been able to judge for myself of this family, I would most cheerfully assist M. Le Mahouet in obtaining the desired position, as I should never dare offer him an inferior one, and at present I know none suitable except the office he seeks."

The old lady had now finished her soup. She again excused herself, saying,

"I am really mortified that this good girl's attentions have obliged me to be so unceremonious. She feared I might get weak for want of something to eat, as my son does not return until about eight o'clock, and I always wait dinner for him."

"I learn from his cards which have guided me here, that he is a lawyer," said the Marquise.

"Yes. The dear child would have greatly preferred the sword to the toga, and he had already resolved to enter Saint Cyr ; but there are some things in life that one cannot control ; circumstances often force us to act at variance with our inclinations," replied the invalid with a sigh.

"His profession at least allows you the happiness of having him with you."

"Ah ! Madame, the words which you have just uttered contain an abridgment of all the joys of life for me. God alone knows the extent of his affectionate care over me, his old grandmother, for I am not his mother, only his grandmother,

Madame, as you must have already conjectured."

The Marquise made a slight inclination of the head.

"Between him and me, poor child," continued the invalid, "there are two tombs."

"Your maternal love is not entirely buried," said the Marquise. "You have still dear ties attaching you to this world."

"Attaching me is truly the expression, for I am astonished myself at being here. You see, Madame, I have been like the old oak, that though partly uprooted and half dead has yet served with its few remaining branches, to protect the poor little plants at its base. Then the little plants grew, and, in turn, twined themselves so firmly around the old oak as to become its stay and support."

"And in entwining themselves around it, they likewise find it their support," was the graceful reply of the Marquise. "You have then several grandchildren?"

"Three: Etienne, the head of the family in every acceptation of the term, the title of seniority like all other titles of superiority when clearly understood, enjoining upon him most onerous duties,—then, two granddaughters, one fifteen years old, the other but thirteen. To my great regret, they had to leave me. At my age and

with my infirmities, I was not able to take charge of their education. Their brother has placed them at the Sacred Heart."

"He has made a wise selection," replied the Marquise, seizing the subject best calculated to make her acquainted with the invalid's opinions and tastes.

Then followed a long conversation upon education, from which they passed to society and the state of religion in Paris, Mme. de Valbret broaching all those serious matters, the most likely to give a clear insight into the principles and life of this family.

The more the conversation was prolonged, the more the Marquise and the invalid were delighted with each other. The latter especially appeared so pleased that the Marquise, despite her fatigue, cheerfully remained much later than she had intended. Finally, before taking leave, wishing to learn something definite concerning the young man's abilities and professional career, she said,

"Such an accomplished, good man as M. de Mahouet, must have numerous clients."

"Not as many as he would like," replied the grandmother. "Etienne is young and very little known. Again, as you can readily believe, he is not one of those who accept all cases offered him. He must be himself convinced ere seeking to

convince others. He suffers from a weak throat, and moreover the uncertainties inseparable from his profession are very wearing upon him. He is anxious to exchange his position, noble as it is, for one more stable, more calm, and which would allow us to regulate our mode of life more evenly. Perhaps, in a few days, he may be able to accomplish this. I have great hopes of it, especially for the last few hours."

"Would you consider me inquisitive in asking you what the new opening is towards which he directs his efforts? I am much interested in knowing it, that I may assist him with my prayers, my most fervent prayers."

"He is trying to obtain a situation now vacant in one of the departments of justice."

"Has he much influential patronage?"

"That of one person only, but a very powerful one. The Marquise de Valbret de Malouars, sister-in-law of the Minister, has promised to do all she can for him. I am especially anxious for his return that I may tell him this good news. He had not dared carry his hopes so high except for the intervention of a friend who charged himself with obtaining this patronage for him. The Marquise desires to see him this very evening, and, as yet, he knows nothing of it. What a pleasant surprise awaits him! Ah! I can truly say," she continued, extending her hand anew

to Mme. de Valbret, "that this day has afforded me many pleasures of which I never dreamed!"

Mme. de Valbret was not astonished at hearing the invalid, evidently a very proud and reserved woman, as was evident from the manner in which she had at first repelled all advances of the Marquise trenching upon their poverty or domestic affairs, now enter into the minutest details. The latter knew that her sympathy had enkindled a like feeling in the grandmother's heart, whose earnest words and manner proved how deeply it had been stirred; and she also knew, that the attraction impelling two souls towards each other, often acts more promptly than the closest relationship, or length of acquaintance.

"I do not despair of being one day very well acquainted with M. Le Mahouet. Meanwhile, I pray God to bless his undertaking."

"It is already blessed by being under the protection of such a person as the Marquise de Valbret," said the old lady, "for you as well as myself must know that the name of this admirable woman inspires respect, not only in our quarter of the city which is likewise yours, but throughout Paris."

The Marquise had not expected the conversation to take this turn. She made a motion of rising, but it was not so easy to arrest the current of thought which she had unwittingly evoked.

The grandmother continued, "She must be at least eight or ten years younger than myself. I shall always remember with pleasure my having talked a long time with her at a ball given by M. de Polignac. She was then just married and as beautiful as an angel."

"Under the Restoration?" inquired Mme. de Valbret with the most lively interest. "Ah! that was a very long time ago! Like ourselves she must now have grown old and have tasted the cup of sufferings."

"I have never seen her since. Shortly after this, the conquest of Algiers deprived me of my husband, who was a colonel in the army. I then withdrew from society and devoted myself to the education of my children. Alas! very soon there remained to me but one, a daughter. Later on, I returned with her to Paris, on her marriage with M. Le Mahouet. Many sorrows overwhelmed me and my grandchildren. I have now and I have had, for a long time, so little communication with the outside world that I know nothing except hearsay concerning persons and things beyond my own family. I do know, however, that this lady, then so young and beautiful, favored with fortune's choicest gifts has since felt the weight of the cross, and that she bears it most courageously. Her father and mother fell victims to the cholera,

her husband died in consequence of a fall from a horse; and the son, born twelve years after marriage, is also dead. He was a religious."

A prey to the most poignant emotion, with clasped hands and great effort at self-control, the Marquise listened. To think of hearing her own history in tones of sympathy from the lips of one whom she herself had visited for the purpose of consoling! Life sometimes reveals to us these strange meetings directed by the finger of God.

The invalid continued.

"It said that the young Valbret never sullied his baptismal innocence, and that great graces have already been obtained at his tomb."

Then bowing her head, she said slowly,

"It is no slight honor to be the mother of a saint."

Tears which she had vainly endeavored to suppress now burst from the eyes of the Marquise. The grandmother with anxious surprise raised her head.

"Pardon me," said Mme. de Valbret, "I weep because—because I too have lost a son."

"Oh! how I regret my remarks!"

"No, do not regret them, for you could not revive a memory which is ever before me."

There was a moment of silence. Between compassion and the fear of saying something

inadvisable, the invalid dared not speak. At last the Marquise asked,

“Are your grand-daughters pleased with the convent of the Sacred Heart?”

“As well as they can be any place without me. They are such good, affectionate children. Here is Therèse, the youngest,” said she, handing Mme. de Valbret one of the photographs on the stand. A pretty face, intelligent and with an air of determination met the eyes of the Marquise.

“And here is my Cécile, a little woman already in mature judgment and behavior.”

The invalid's almost transparent hand now offered a second frame, attached to the back of which hung a small object dangling against it. Mme. de Valbret beheld a calm, handsome face blending the charms of extreme youth with a slight shade of precocious gravity.

“She is the living portrait of her brother,” said the grandmother unconscious of the impression these words made upon Mme. de Valbret.

“She must be charming, judging by her face,” replied the latter.

As she instinctively turned the picture in restoring it to the old lady, the object at the back of it struck her attention. It was a lapis-lazuli medallion upon which in diamond dust were traced tiny myosotis. Instantly, she arrested her gesture, and whilst apparently studying the face

of Mlle. Le Mahouet, it was the medallion concealed in the hollow of her hand that she examined. A moment sufficed to determine her course,—she must have the key of this enigma. A sudden idea shot through her mind.

“Madame,” said she, “will you pardon me for inquiring if this medallion has always belonged to Mlle. Le Mahouet?”

“No,” replied the grandmother, adding in a sad tone, “and I truly wish she had never had it, since it recalls a separation. But why, Madame, do you ask this question?”

“Because many years ago, half a century, I might say, I gave a similar medallion to one of my friends. Poor Fanny! she is no more, and, this trinket, reminding me of our girlish friendship brings her vividly before me. We were together at the convent.”

“This medallion likewise symbolizes a warm friendship. Cécile received it from a young girl to whom she is devotedly attached, and whom she will doubtless never see again, for it was a farewell present.”

“Does the young girl not live in Paris?”

“Yes, but it is not distance alone that separates,” said the grandmother, as affixing the medallion to the back of the picture, she replaced them upon the stand.

“It is I who arrange them thus,” she murmured.

The Marquise trembled with emotion. The invalid bent her head and tears gleamed upon her lashes. Oh! the tears of the aged! those tears which the last throes of life and its sorrows can still wring from a heart well nigh exhausted, how excruciating they are! Mme. de Valbret took the invalid's hand in her own, and with look and voice full of sympathy, said, "Just now I wept, and I feared not to tell you the cause of my tears."

The invalid, covering her face with one hand, and yielding both to her own inclinations and the charm of her visitor's gentle manner, murmured,

"Oh! how I long to see my children happy!"

The Marquise arose.

"Have confidence in God," said she, "in Him Who has filled our hearts with the ineffable solicitude of maternal love. Providence watches over all and guides the course of events; yes," she continued, with animation, "a thousand times better than we could ever do. Adieu, Madame, I shall take with me a profound impression of these moments spent in your presence."

"Pray repeat your visit very soon," was the reply.

"I shall not, Madame, see you often enough. I cannot tell you how long it has been since I had a visit that has done me so much good."

"I will return," said the Marquise smiling, "do not doubt it."

Seeing that Mme. de Valbret must really take leave, the invalid rang her bell for the servant to light the way. Hearing the door close, she rang again.

"Anne Marie," said she, "you must always bring Mme. Geoffroy in to see me when she comes, even if I should be suffering or asleep. In the latter case, do not fear to awaken me . . . Evidently, she is, like myself, a victim to the vicissitudes of fortune," murmured the old lady, softly adding,

"What a pity that Etienne should have been so late this evening."

Meanwhile, the Marquise with considerable effort was descending the badly lighted staircase. Finally, she reached the portico opening to the street. Just as she crossed the threshold a young man entered, and perceiving the outlines of a woman in the shadow, lifted his hat.

"It is time indeed that I was going," thought Mme. de Valbret.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MARQUISE'S SOIRÉE.

A YOUNG woman, bright, pretty and delicate looking moved restlessly about in the apartments of Mme. de Valbret. Rich and tasteful clothing adorned this gentle creature. Seeing her, we might have been tempted to believe that one of Greuze's most charming creations had become animated, and left its flowery frame, bidding defiance to the grave ancestral beauties, who, from their heights on the walls of the grand drawing-room, silently contemplated the scene. She seemed to give little attention to these solemn figures, but her eyes often sought the clock; then, warming her feet a moment at the fire, she would rise, walk to the window, and drawing aside the curtains, endeavor to peer into the street. At last, she rang a bell. A servant arrayed in his livery of state appeared.

"I cannot understand it," said the young woman. "You say, Pierre, that it was half-past five o'clock when Mme. de Valbret went out."

"Scarcely that, Madame. And it has now

struck eight! And Madame the Marquise has eaten nothing except a biscuit!"

"But was she to return in time to dine at her accustomed hour?"

"Alas! she did well to say that perhaps she would not dine at all to-day. She added that she was going to one of her neighbors. I do not know whom she meant, but without knowing the people, I wish them—How can they fatigue and bother Madame the Marquise, at her age!"

Mme. de Broz could not help smiling. The old man was evidently the senior of his venerated mistress, and this constant allusion to age whenever there was question of sparing her care or fatigue, would have seemed to him utterly absurd, not to be heard of, had Mme. de Valbret used the same argument in urging an abatement of his zeal and activity in her service. The young woman replied,

"Oh! if my aunt said that, we need not be uneasy. A delay anticipated ceases to be a delay, Pierre. Please moisten the stems of the violets, I have put in the King's cup."

A bunch of natural violets, Parma violets, showed their modest heads in the porphyry cup which Louis XII. had given this same Hugues de Valbret, whose hand had once pressed that of St. Vincent de Paul. The young woman knew that

her aunt was especially fond of these humble, fragrant flowers; and touched at the kindness of the latter in so readily granting her request for a little reunion of her friends this evening, she had endeavored in this delicate offering to express her appreciation of it.

Pierre hastened to obey. His hand trembling with respect he sprinkled the violets in the royal cup with a few drops of water to help them retain their freshness. It was then he perceived that this huge bunch was composed of tiny bouquets. He turned towards Mme. de Broz, undecided and astonished himself at the liberty, he thought of taking. However, the desire tugging at his heart was so great that it emboldened him.

"Madame," he murmured, "might I make so free as to ask your permission to take one of these bouquets into Madame the Marquise's little parlor?"

"Certainly, if you think it would be agreeable to Mme. de Valbret."

The old man joyfully seized the bouquet nearest his hand and withdrew, actually smiling upon the flowers he carried.

"Oh! how lovely they are!" he murmured, "at this season of the year!"

Entering the little parlor, he set down the taper which had lighted him, and clasping his

hands before the portrait of the young monk, he thus apostrophized it,

“My master, my dear angel! this is but a trifle and not even my own gift! Ah! if I only knew where to find them, you should have these flowers every day.”

Placing the bouquet in an angle of the frame, he stood a moment gazing at the serene, beautiful face now illumined by the taper's soft glow. At last he left the room, shaking his head and murmuring,

“I am not surprised that Madame no longer loves anything but the good God and the poor.”

Meanwhile, Mme. de Broz all alone in the grand drawing-room gave vent in these words to her regret and impatience:

“If I had only known this! I who took so much pleasure at the thought of an agreeable surprise by coming long before the time!”

She at last opened the Erard piano in a corner of the room, struck a few chords, and then seating herself at the beautiful instrument, ran her fingers over the key board. A brilliant *allegro* which she played from memory now filled the air with melody. To this succeeded an *adagio* of Beethoven. May not, perchance, the gravity of this new piece have been better fitted to an interruption than the lively air preceding it? Perhaps so. Certain it is that just amidst the music

of these slow, expressive notes, a voice exclaimed,

“ Really, this is admirable ! ”

Madame de Broz turned to behold the Marquise standing in one of the doors and smiling mischievously at her.

The young woman hastened towards her, exclaiming, “ I had almost despaired of ever seeing you again.”

“ And I did not dream of finding you here at this time.”

“ I was so afraid of yielding to my bad habit of being five minutes too late that I came an hour too soon.”

“ Just see how I am punished for having believed you incorrigible. But what is this ? ” said the marquise, pointing to the violets whose perfume had struck her attention.

“ It is a multitude of little voices murmuring, ‘ There is some one in this world whom we love to please.’ ”

Mme. de Valbret drew the young woman towards her and imprinting a kiss upon her forehead said,

“ You are more than charming.”

“ Aunt, I should really like to know where you found that costume ? ” said Mme. de Broz, who herself covered with lace and satin, had been curiously examining the Marquise's attire.

The latter could not help laughing, for catching a glimpse of herself in one of the large mirrors, she could easily judge of the which impression her figure must have made upon Mme. de Broz.

"Never mind," said she, "my costume is like your playing,—a prelude."

"I am wearied out."

"Have you dined?"

"No, indeed. I never dine before seven o'clock. I relied upon breaking the bread of hospitality with you."

"What childishness in you not to have had your dinner served, when you found I was so late returning! Come to the table right away; I will change my dress afterwards."

Like the young princess whose portrait Mme. de Grignan has left us, Mme. de Broz knew how to eat and talk at the same time. As to the Marquise, this evening, she could scarcely do either. Her pale features plainly betokened fatigue, and a certain occupation of mind was also reflected upon them. The young woman noticed it.

"Have I not been inconsiderate," said she, "in asking you to change the quiet ways of your household, that I may enjoy this little reunion? I am tempted to reproach myself for it."

"You do yourself a wrong, my child," was the Marquise's earnest reply. "Enjoy to the fullest extent your innocent little distraction, and believe

that I am very happy to give you this feeble mark of my affection."

"You are so good and kind!" said the young woman tenderly. "If I lived in Paris, you would surely convert me."

"What nonsense, Marie! If you really needed conversion, I would not let you escape so easily."

"Seriously, out of charity for you I am going to try and become better, so that when you undertake my reformation there will not be so much left for you to do."

"I accept the task, on conditions, however, that you spend eight days with me in La Bresse, that I may have an opportunity of judging of your progress."

"Most willingly. What a pleasure to think of returning to La Bresse," she exclaimed, her delicate fingers meantime seeding a bunch of amber colored grapes. "I will play the organ, during services. Your church has an organ, I suppose?"

"Not yet."

"Sure enough, the church is being rebuilt. You are going to give it an organ, are you not?"

"Certainly."

"Then I will play at its inauguration. If I could just find there another young woman, musical like myself—"

"You will."

"Truly! I thought I heard you say that your

neighbors for ten leagues around were anything but musicians."

"I did say so, but such a state of affairs can be changed. This is a settled point, and when you come to see me next summer at my château, you will there meet a most beautiful, gentle, agreeable lady, whose bridal call on me I shall tell her, must be a sojourn under my roof."

"It is a young married lady, then?"

"She is not yet married."

"A young girl! Do I know her?"

"Perhaps so."

"How you puzzle me! Aunt, I read something mysterious in your face. Whom do you mean?"

"Suppose you run over in your mind the names of the young ladies around me."

Mme. de Broz, a smile upon her lips, her thoughts lost in vacancy, sat motionless a moment, leaning against the high back of the sculptured chair, whilst her hand, carelessly resting on the table, still held a handsome gilded knife. The eyes of the Marquise were fixed upon her with an almost melancholy tenderness. She was so young, so pretty, so artless, but alas! so frail, nervous and delicate, despite her vivacity!

"Oh! I have it!" she exclaimed suddenly, "Marguerite de Bois Rougés!"

"Ah! you will never make a prophetess!"

replied Mme. de Valbret laughing. "You haven't the least gift of reading secrets."

She arose, and arresting with a gesture the young woman, who was on the point of following her example, said,

"Let me beg of you not to hurry through your dinner. Here is some cake which you have not even tasted. I would remain and keep you company, did not the hour warn me that it is time to prepare for the reception of my guests. I might be surprised by the arrival of some of them. Do you quietly finish your meal whilst I dress?"

The Marquise now left the room and Mme. de Broz remained alone to reap the benefit of Pierre's attentions, which he lavished on her, meanwhile murmuring to himself,

"Madame, the Marquise has eaten nothing! scarcely a taste of jelly and the same amount of *chaud-froid*. If she had not had to do the honors of her table for her niece, she would have taken no dinner at all, I am sure. Her appetite vanishes when she does not eat at the usual hour. If Madame thinks she can live long in this manner, taking so little care of herself, she is much mistaken."

During this soliloquy, Mme. de Talbret was engaged in her toilette. Françoise having curled her mistress's white locks, now arranged the

curls in light bunches, Mme. de Valbret meanwhile gazing with a sort of resignation at the velvet robe and costly laces spread out before her.

"Does Madame like her hair this way?" said the girl, handing her mistress a miniature Venetian mirror.

"Yes, very much."

"Madame did not tell me what head-dress she wished to wear. I have got out the one ornamented with feathers."

"Yes, that will suit."

The finishing touches were just being given, when Mme. de Broz asked her relative's permission to enter the room.

"O aunt! how I would like to see you always looking thus!" she exclaimed.

The young servant's beaming eyes expressed the same wish. Arrayed in garments costly and elegant as became her high rank, although simple and unostentatious in accordance not only with her age but even more so with her bereaved heart, the Marquise de Valbret seemed a majestic apparition, such as one sometimes sees in those paintings wherein the artist's skillful hand has set before us the embodiment of ancient grandeur, softened and mellowed by the light of Christianity's hallowed sentiments.

"You look like Ary Scheffer's St. Monica,"

continued Mme. de Broz; "no, I have made a mistake, I mean Flandrin's St. Felicite."

"Try again;" said the Marquise, "in studying all the schools, you may at last hit upon the exact thing."

Saying this, she handed her niece a little brass key.

"Will you really allow me to handle your jewels?" returned the latter, fitting the key into a little ebony cabinet.

"Yes, and to select which I shall wear this evening."

"Oh! how kind you are! I must consider well ere making my selection."

It was the Marquise, however, who at last decided the choice, as the most expeditious way of finishing her toilette, Mme. de Broz being too long in making up her mind.

"Come, Marie," said the Marquise to the latter, "let us go now to the drawing room; and let me prepare you not to be surprised, if, from time to time, some of your invited guests disappear in my train, for I feel called upon this evening to hold several private audiences."

"Aunt, you have really become a veritable enigma to me."

They seated themselves before the vast fireplace, the glowing reflections of which combined with the brilliant chandeliers to fill this spacious apart-

ment with light and heat. The beautiful and delicately wrought tapestries gleamed forth in these colored rays; and one might have imagined life in those heraldic figures that stood proud and silent witnesses of the joys and grandeurs of the animated throng at their feet, coming and going, disappearing in turn as do all the children of man, all the sojourners on earth.

“I must finish my confession,” said the young woman, leaning back carelessly in the arm-chair. “I told you that I had taken the liberty of adding some names to those on the list which you were so kind as to endorse. I must now show you these additional names. They are very few indeed.”

Drawing from her pocket a little ivory tablet, she read aloud the eight or ten names written on it. At each one the Marquise inclined her head approvingly. Mme. de Broz closed the tablet as she pronounced the last.

“Vangaramenghen—the whole family,” said she, “that is, the father, mother and daughter. Ah!” she continued, “I know you will be pleased with Mlle. Vangaramenghen. I am so delighted at the opportunity of presenting her to you, for it is something I have often thought of doing. She is a young girl whose presence inspires the greatest respect. She is truly unostentatious, simple and amiable, yet her very glance,

I know not why, is calculated to awaken respect and admiration."

"And her parents?" inquired the Marquise.

"Her father is a most gentlemanly person. Her step-mother (for the young girl is the child of a former marriage), her step-mother is a little lacking in some things, but she is graceful, agreeable, receives well and is a good musician."

"You have done well to invite them, my child. I endorse your selection most heartily," said Mme. de Valbret.

"You must not reproach me any more with being spoiled by my husband," replied the young woman, extending her hand to the Marquise, who warmly clasped it in her own,—this thin, white, nervous little hand. Just then the door was opened and Pierre's voice solemnly announced,

"M. the Count de Vaugrand."

"It is you, dear Count! Good evening, my old friend," said the two ladies in unison, as they stepped forward to greet him.

The guests continued to arrive.

* * * * *

One hour later, Mme. de Valbret's drawing-room presented a grand and beautiful scene. On all sides were heard the interchange of salutations, friendly words and the flow of wit. Groups would form here and there, disperse and

form again. Animation reigned without trespassing upon the domains of dignity and reserve. In the midst of this polished circle, one felt that life still throbbed in the heart of that old school of French urbanity, which, unhappily for the present generation, seems dying out, carrying with it the purest and most salutary charms of past ages. . Pretty little Mme. de Broz, radiant with happiness, went from one to another, congratulating herself aloud upon the good fortune of thus seeing assembled friends from whom she was separated the most of her time. The Marquise did not resign even in her niece's favor, the right of welcoming guests invited to her house; and as is nearly always the case when a person of feeling, delicacy, education and great intelligence presides over a reunion, every one felt the charm of such a presence, and experienced a degree of satisfaction and pleasure so much the greater in proportion as it was calm and elevated.

Against a background formed of the sombre draperies of the window was seen the white figure of Renée Vangaramenghen. The deep emotion which she vainly endeavored to banish was reflected in her sparkling eyes, and her pallid face that almost rivalled the color of her dress. Several rows of pearls twined amid her dark hair were her only ornament. This simplicity of dress enhanced her exquisite beauty, and the

Marquise, from time to time, could not refrain from gazing upon her in admiration. "Renée's noble countenance," thought she, "is but a feeble reflection of her soul. And to think that such a child is to be sacrificed! Yes, but God is faithful."

Near Renée was seated her step-mother, who, fully aware that a gaudy and excessive display of dress would not find favor in Mme. de Valbret's eyes, had confined her love of ornamentation within the bounds of good taste. She was talking with some on her right, but in a manner evidently betraying pre-occupation of mind, for her eyes, after wandering over the drawing-room, were finally fixed upon the door, as were also Renée's.

Mme. de Broz approached the latter.

"I wish to present you to my aunt," said she. "You ought to have come sooner, I have been so desirous of your knowing her, and I regret that this evening affords you the opportunity for so slight an acquaintance with her. I am just waiting until she comes in this direction. But what is the matter with you, this evening? you are as pale as a lily."

"I am a little fatigued, but that is of no consequence."

"She goes out too much with one of our Belgian cousins," interrupted Mme. Vangarmenghen. "And you know, dear Madame, that

once started in Paris, strangers are not easily stopped."

"You have too scrupulously filled your rôle of *cicerone*," said Mme. de Broz.

"Oh! no, I assure you I have not," replied Renée.

She was silent; the Marquise continuing to converse in turn with her guests, was now but a step or two from them. Mme. de Broz gently called her and presenting the banker's wife, said, "Mme. Vangaramenghen."

The Marquise's penetrating glance rested for a moment upon the slighty downcast eyes of this brilliant woman of fashion, who, in spite of herself, felt somewhat ill at ease. With an effort to appear the contrary however, she paid her respects to the dignified, elegant old lady before her.

"I have already expressed to Mme. de Broz how much I am indebted to her for having procured me the honor of receiving you, Madame," said the Marquise, in a tone quite gracious and pleasant, but at the same time so dignified as to savor of that extreme politeness which lacks cordiality.

"And here is Mlle. Vangaramenghen, of whom I have also spoken to you," returned Mme. de Broz.

The Marquise turned towards Renée, by which movement she escaped the step-mother's scrutiny.

A look of joy and tenderness beamed from the eyes of both Mme. de Valbret and the young girl, whilst a smile of recognition flitted over their faces.

“Will you not shake hands with me, Mademoiselle?” said the former.

Renée laughed outright as she put her hand in that of the Marquise, who bending towards her, whispered,

“Remember my advice.”

“Have no doubts of that,” was Renée’s answer.

Mme. Vangaramenghen, separated from her step-daughter by the Marquise, could not see the pressure of the hand nor hear the words they exchanged, but Mme. de Broz who could, was filled with astonishment.

“They knew one another before,” thought she, “and how could that be? aunt never mentioned it, and it is very evident that she has never met Mme. Vangaramenghen until to-night. There certainly must be something under all this.”

Suddenly an idea flashed through her mind.

“Ah! this is the enigma, I have been striving to solve the last hour or so,—a young girl, pretty and soon to be married,—this is the very thing. Ah! dear aunt, you have managed so well that without knowing it, I have taken part in the play. I caught the words, ‘Remember my advice.’

So she expected to see Renée this evening, and I gave the invitation without a hint of all this. I am truly puzzled to know the meaning, but still when one holds the thread of the labyrinth, there is no fear whatever of losing the right path. Oh! how very funny! This is the first time I have ever played the part of a diplomatist."

This diplomacy was doubtless of too recent a date not to betray itself by some slight signs to one whose suspicions had already been awakened. Renée's pallor now gave way to a fugitive blush, and her eyes were suddenly bent upon her hands. Enframed by the silken drapery of the door appeared the visage of Mme. de Grenaff, and behind her came Alphonse, whose head dressed *à la Capoul* towered above the trembling roses decorating the Baroness's hair. In an instant, Mme. de Grenaff's eyes made a tour of the room, and discovering Mme. Vangaramenghen, she soon managed, though saluting and chatting with friends right and left, to find her way to the corner whence the banker's wife had made her a sign with her fan. She now took Alphonse's arm. Midway, she met Mme. de Broz who, was advancing towards her.

"How delighted I am to meet you this year in Paris," said the latter. "I can now return to Vienna without fear, for no member of the embassy would have given me a very warm reception

had I been unable to bring them any news of one whose departure from their midst is so much regretted."

"Tell them that, 'the farther from the eyes, the nearer the heart,' is a maxim, the truth of which I feel more deeply every day," replied the Baroness, in a voice betokening emotion. "You know Vienna will ever be cherished in my heart as one of those memories, illuminated by the brilliant rays of that sun called happiness. But before saying more of those to whom you, more fortunate than myself, will so soon be reunited, permit me to introduce my nephew, M. Montpollin."

"I thank Monsieur for having accepted the invitation to accompany you this evening," said Mme. de Broz with a pleasant smile.

One of those automatic movements, the very acme of the reigning fashion, assured Mme. de Broz that the handsome stranger's manners and elegant bearing could not be surpassed.

"Take a seat," continued Mme. de Broz.

"I believe I see a vacant chair near Mme. Vangaramenghen," replied the Baroness, fretting inwardly at being hindered in reaching her friend.

"Leaving you to take possession of it, as that is your choice, I will rejoin you after while."

Alphonse listened most attentively to every word that Mme. de Grenaff uttered. He was a

perfect stranger to nine-tenths of the people introduced to him, and he was in mortal dread of committing some grave error. At last, he heard these solemn words,—words opening to him so beautiful a perspective.

“My dear, this is my nephew, Alphonse; I introduce you to Mme. and Mlle. Vangaramenghen.”

Renée, very pale, acknowledged the introduction by an inclination. A smile played upon her step-mother’s lips.

“Ah!” said she, “how wrong in you to have kept us waiting so long for the pleasure of your nephew’s acquaintance. You behold me quite angry with the Baroness for this, Monsieur.”

“Then I pity her, Madame, for there are some whose anger it would be very painful to incur.”

Mme. Vangaramenghen smiled again. The Baroness gave her a triumphant look, endeavoring, at the same time, to draw her chair nearer the latter.

“Let me assist you, aunt,” said Alphonse, pushing the chair on its rollers, and taking advantage of this movement to whisper in Mme. de Grenaff’s ear :—

“I am indeed captivated.”

And he was sincere.

Yet that very morning he had said to Xavier de Bois Rougés, “I shall see her through the

dazzling illumination of a million." But in speaking thus he had not counted upon the pure, calm beauty of her whose hand he sought; and the impression it made upon him was such that for at least six minutes, he had forgotten all about the million; and when his thought returned thence he found it a mere secondary consideration.

"I do not see M. Vangaramenghen," said the Baroness.

"There he is on the left, in the midst of that group that seems to be discussing something important. However, in a little while, he will join us."

"My nephew is very fond of the country, and spends nearly all his time there; he is a real rustic, a—"

"If I were a Parisian you would humble my national pride," said Mme. Vangaramenghen.

Alphonse made another bow, and fingered his long, thin moustache, which actions might be interpreted thus: "I am filled with confusion, I am completely enchanted!"

"My step-daughter, like Monsieur, is very fond of the beauties of nature," continued Mme. Vangaramenghen.

"And the distance from Touraine to Anjou is not so great that there should be much differ-

ence in the general aspect of these two sections of the country," added Mme. de Grenaff.

The path which Alphonse had been racking his brain to find was opened to view by these words, and he boldly entered upon it.

"Does Mademoiselle reside in that part of Touraine near Baugeois?" said he, addressing Renée.

"A little beyond that, Monsieur, in the neighborhood of Chenonceaux."

"Upon the borders of the Cher with its picturesque scenery!"

"Will not Monsieur take a seat?"

Alphonse hastened to accept the invitation.

"Touraine is a favored locality; do you not agree with me, Mademoiselle?"

"Assuredly, Monsieur, it is rich and fertile."

Seeing the conversation thus begun, the Baroness behind the shelter of her fan, whispered to her friend,—

"Ah! my dear! I am sick of this! My poor nephew is completely carried away, so much so that he could not eat his dinner. I had some choice partridges for him and he left them untouched."

Had Alphonse heard these remarks, he would doubtless have been convinced that his aunt's desire of making herself agreeable had certainly played havoc with her memory.

"He is a delightful young man," murmured the step-mother, "such elegant manners, so intelligent—"

"One cannot make out what is going on; everything is so stiff and formal."

"Stir him up a little."

"I dare not. I would never dream of doing so here."

"A person may be prudent—and yet not so terribly straight-laced."

"I know him too well. He would make you die of laughter."

"Do let me prevail upon you. . . . I heartily wish somebody would infuse a little wit and animation into this reunion! Do you not find my receptions far more delightful?"

The Baroness made no reply. During the General's lifetime she had been an invited guest even in the dwellings of royalty, and had had ample opportunity of contrasting the difference between persons of various classes and tastes. What had escaped her desires had nevertheless remained imprinted upon her memory; and she found very enjoyable the drawing-rooms of the Marquise de Valbret, reflecting something of past splendor, and pervaded by that clear, serene atmosphere in which dignity is unfaltering, gayety honest and wit unsullied. The pleasure which she insensibly experienced from all this, blurred

the edge of her blind and presumptuous vanity. Meanwhile, Alphonse continued his conversation with the young girl.

“Ah! yes, a country life is indeed delightful. To receive one’s friends, to enjoy a liberty which does not exclude elegance, to hunt like a Nimrod, to be a king in one’s own little domain, to—to visit the poor,” he suddenly added, the remembrance of his aunt’s words just then occurring to him.

At the last remark, Renée bent her eyes upon him.

“I have always thought,” said she, “that the office of a landed proprietor should somewhat resemble that of the guardian angels of a country.”

“Beyond doubt, Mademoiselle. These good peasants, these honest farmers”—(gracious! thought he, what a mischief of a track I have run into!)—“yes, one does right to lend them assistance,” he finished off by saying, finding himself inextricably embarrassed.

“Charity is the grand remedy for the evils of our day,” continued the young girl.

“Certainly, Mademoiselle. Those who possess riches have the right to devote a portion of their income, every year, to the relief of the poor and suffering.”

“Do not call it a right, but a duty.”

“ Ah ! a duty, is what I meant to say.”

“ Can you two make a place for me near you ?” suddenly inquired the musical voice of Mme. de Broz. Mme. Vangaramenghen and the Baroness to whom these words were addressed, both exclaimed at once.

“ Ah ! dear Madame, is it you ?

Alphonse arose immediately, and advanced the arm-chair in which the young woman seated herself.

“ Thank you very much,” said she regarding him with an eye of curiosity, her thoughts meanwhile running in this vein :

“ Mme. de Grenaff should not keep her nephew hanging around the Vangaramenghen ladies, in this way. I am sure Renée is not pleased at it. If he stays beside her three minutes longer, I will ask his arm, and walk him around all the rest of the evening.”

Suddenly an idea crossed her mind.

“ Oh ! how foolish I am,” was her answer to this passing thought. “ Aunt has certainly some intimation of a future marriage : and when I asked her permission to invite here this evening Mme. de Grenaff’s relative, she thought I meant the senator, who is a widower the second time, and has eleven grand-children. It was I myself who addressed the invitation sent to this young man. Most decidedly, he does not strike me

very favorably. . . . Oh! but it does irritate me. . . . What were you saying of Schubert's music?"

By this question suddenly cast across her reflections, she endeavored to connect herself with the conversation which the Baroness was valiantly sustaining.

"I said that Schubert seems to me to be the interpreter of souls, he is so expressive and sensitive."

"You are indeed right."

A smile of satisfaction accompanied this reply. Alphonse not daring to prolong his conversation farther, had just made a few steps in the direction of the group which Mme. Vangaramenghen had indicated to him; but he had not had time to approach it. A tall, distinguished looking man barred the way.

"I see that you have just left the Baroness de Grenaff, and I judge from this that you are M. de Montpollin."

"Yes, Monsieur."

"I am M. Vangaramenghen. I should not have known you except for the above circumstance. Let us have a little talk together, if agreeable to you."

"Certainly, I am at your service, Monsieur."

The two walked off together followed by Mme. Vangaramenghen's gold lorgnette, and the anx-

ious gaze of the Baroness, who nevertheless continued to entertain Mme. de Broz with a flow of talk about the Austrians and the Bavarians.

Renée felt her heart wrung with anguish inexpressible. In the few trifling, commonplace remarks exchanged with him who was going to ask her to link her life with his, what had she learned? Nothing, nothing whatever concerning his morals, character, disposition. To be sure, he had that urbanity, that politeness and ease of manner which bespoke acquaintance with the best society, but which is a reflection oftener of the usages of the day than of the man's heart. What would the revelations of the future be? The poor child felt like a traveller who finds himself in a dense forest, the outskirts of which may abound with beautiful flowers, but the depths perhaps be the abode of venomous snakes. She trembled at the thought that her father was even now engaged in the all-important conversation with the young man, and if his responses were satisfactory, she would soon be called upon to ratify the promise, which, no doubt, her father had already given. To strengthen herself, she repeated mentally these words.

“I will give an answer to-morrow, according to promise, and not until to-morrow. I shall have that much determination. O my God, have pity on me!”

Was then the expected succor about to fail her? The Marquise was nowhere to be seen. Just about the time that Mme. de Grenaff and her nephew entered the drawing-room, Mme. de Valbret had disappeared, after the servant, with a respectful inclination, had spoken a few words to her.

Renée's feverish glance eagerly interrogated the groups around her. Oh! how she longed to fly from this joyous place, and take refuge in that chamber where a few hours ago she had given full vent to her tears and found in them courage and consolation! M. Vangaramenghen and Alphonse, withdrawn into the embrasure of a window, had just made a movement; doubtless, they were about to approach her. The banker presses the young man's hand. Renée sees it, and also that they are coming towards her. The lights grow dim before her, she bends her head, her heart is beating as if it would burst. Once again she raises her eyes towards that door through which disappeared her support, her ægis. But alas! there is nothing, nothing to bid her hope. Suddenly a hand touches her on the shoulder, and a voice which startles her, says,

“Here I am.”

The little parlor, that dear sanctuary, has been opened without Renée's perceiving it, and Mme. de Valbret has returned to take the place which

seems to have been bequeathed her by the friend now passed away. Renée rises; upon her quivering lips is the smile which says, "I hope."

The Marquise says to Mme. de Broz, "Give me your place, Marie, I have not yet had the favor of a moment's conversation with these ladies."

The young woman obeyed, quite astonished, however, for she sees that her aunt is not acquainted with Mme. Vangaramenghen; and she knows well that Mme. de Grenaff has never succeeded in finding her way to that same aunt's sympathies and confidence. But Renée, whose hand Mme. de Valbret clasps, Renée, the mysterious betrothed, is certainly the cause of this assiduous attention. Now is the moment to penetrate the secret. Mme. de Broz looks at her aunt, then at Renée, and listens.

"Are you a musician?" inquires the hostess.

"Yes, Madame; but I scarcely dare call myself one, beside Mme. Vangaramenghen," is the young girl's answer.

"Do you hear, Madame, what your daughter says? She reveals your talent to me."

"Renée has nothing to envy me, Madame."

Mme. de Broz finds it difficult from the conversation to draw the least conclusion. Saying to herself, "I will return after matters get started," she joins another group. Almost at the

same instant, M. Vangaramenghen approaches Mme. de Grenaff.

"I have not yet had the pleasure of speaking to you this evening, Madame," says he, making an inclination before her.

"Ah! and how do you find things?" says she, almost as much with her eyes as her voice.

"I am very much pleased."

"Ah!"

This "ah" is neither a sigh, nor a smile, nor a tear, but a combination of them all.

A significant pressure of the hand is exchanged between the Baroness and her friend. Oh! why should the Marquise de Valbret, unfortunately, be seated just here beside Renée, rendering it impossible by her presence for the grand subject to be broached! Equally impossible were it to interrupt this privileged conversation which the mistress of the house prolongs.

"Decidedly, some favors are very inopportune," murmurs Mme. de Grenaff.

Alphonse stands a little back of the group, with distended eyes and quickened respiration, not daring to advance, not wishing to withdraw. . . . Mme. de Valbret is telling M. Vangaramenghen how one of the portraits in her drawing-room was taken by stealth, by the painter Rigault. The account is prolix and wearisome to certain ones of the group. Mme.

de Grenaff no longer pays any attention to it. Hoping to change the subject she makes a sign for Alphonse to approach, and, taking advantage of the first instant's respite, she says to the Marquise,

"Madame, I have not yet had the honor of presenting my nephew to you."

Understanding by these words that the person she had been expecting and waiting to see is on the spot, Mme. de Valbret turns towards the speaker. Alphonse succeeds better than ever in the salutation with which he offers his profound homage.

The Marquise, at sight of the young man, cannot restrain a slight movement of surprise. Her eyes are fixed a moment upon his face with an indefinable expression, and then a smile plays around her lips.

"I am delighted to receive you, Monsieur," she says.

A new salutation from Alphonse is the graceful response that words would have left incomplete.

"I am really delighted to receive you," repeats the Marquise.

This emphatic welcome astonishes the Baroness. Alphonse himself feels greatly flattered at it, and he finds the Marquise admirable—never

in his life has he met any one so imposing and withal so gracious.

"Oh! this woman," thinks he, "is a veritable queen!"

Renée believes the moment is come in which the Marquise will find the means of engaging the young man in that confidential talk which must throw a few rays of light upon the darkness enveloping her (Renée's) troubled future. But, to her surprise, Mme. de Valbret turns anew to M. Vangaramenghen, and resumes the subject which the Baroness has endeavored to banish.

"You will find this Rigault something very fine. Since you are fond of paintings, Monsieur, I will show you my best. I have a celebrated Velasquez. If you will accompany me, it will give me pleasure to show it to you.

"Most willingly, Madame, I shall indeed be very grateful to you."

Taking the banker's proffered arm, the Marquise says to Renée,

"Would it be agreeable to you also to come with us, Mademoiselle?"

"Oh! yes, yes, Madame," responds the latter, eagerly.

Talking together, the three withdraw and disappear behind the portière of the little parlor.

"Oh! but this is just too trying!" says Mme. de Grenaff in consternation. "The last thing

one could have wished to happen ! Who knows when we shall see them re-appear ? ”

“ If it be only a picture, my dear— ”

“ Why should they take Renée with them ? Is she much interested in paintings ? ”

“ Oh ! ” replied Mme. Vangaramenghen with a slight shrug of the shoulders, “ how do I know ? she is always taking up some new branch of art or science. I am so pleased, my dear friend, at the prospects of our plan. You and your nephew must dine with us to-morrow. ”

“ With pleasure, provided the affair be settled. ”

“ Oh ! nonsense ! What is to prevent its being settled now, since there is no difficulty as to residence ? ”

“ Ah ! Madame, ” says Alphonse, resuming the place he had quitted at sight of Mme. de Broz, “ I am soon going to be either the happiest or the most unhappy of men. ”

“ It is not in my power to bid you live or to condemn you to death, ” replies the stepmother, smiling. “ I am not the sacrificer, I am only the augur. ”

“ Ah ! Madame, be so kind as to tell me, then, if you deem the omens favorable. ”

“ How can I tell you when I am puzzled myself ? This is the first time I have ever had to study a phenix. ”

Alphonse is charmed; smoothing his moustache he makes one of his most graceful bows. Mme. Vangaramenghen laughs at the success of her compliment. Mme. de Grenaff keeps her eye on the door of the little parlor, still so mercilessly closed. Her friend, leaning over towards her, says,

“Will you not stir him up a little?”

“No,” answers the Baroness flatly.

Alphonse, however, catching the words, and being most desirous of ingratiating himself into the favor of her whom he would like to call mother-in-law, ventures upon a few remarks of doubtful taste. The latter bursts out laughing, but the Baroness, frowning even more severely than the Jupiter of the poets, nudges Alphonse with the end of her fan and says to him in an undertone, “To-morrow, at her house, say to her what you will. Here, be very circumspect, both in speech and general deportment, or, I will take you home.”

Between the invitation and the prohibition Alphonse finds himself in a dilemma, to extricate himself from which he rises and walks off.

Suddenly a hand takes hold of his arm. Turning abruptly he beholds Xavier de Bois Rougés.

“Here you are!” is the exclamation one hears from both.

"Ah, my dear fellow, is she here?" inquired Xavier.

"Don't talk so loud," answered Alphonse. "Oh! I am above the clouds. Let us get a little farther off from all these people; I wish to have some conversation with you."

"I cannot, for I am not alone."

"Nor am I."

"Circumstances are such that I cannot just now leave the person who came with me. However, I can give you a few minutes. Let me say a word to him."

Xavier now took a few steps, followed by Alphonse, who, without knowing why, felt greatly rejoiced and strengthened, as it were, by the sudden presence of his cousin. So unexpectedly to come across Xavier—to have him for a confidant, perhaps, an auxiliary—it was certainly lucky. Xavier might have gone the length of the room, and Alphonse would have followed close in his track. However, they had but few steps to take. At a sufficiently short distance to have permitted Xavier to lay hold of Alphonse's arm, stood a young man, whose air of distinction and gentle gravity would have attracted attention even in such an assemblage as this.

"My dear friend," said Xavier to him, "I beg you to excuse me for a few minutes. I will soon rejoin you. I wish to have a little talk with

my relative, M. Gauthier de Montpollin, whom I now introduce to you," he added, turning courteously towards Alphonse, to whom in like manner he said, "One of my friends, M. Étienne Le Mahouet."

Singular thing indeed! As the two young men looked at each other when introduced, a strange expression was visible on the countenances of both, a half smile, somewhat ironical on Étienne's face, contemptuous on that of Alphonse.

"I have the honor of saluting you, sir," said the former.

"I am delighted, Sir, delighted to see you," replied Alphonse, in a tone evidently implying that he had no wish to continue the acquaintance.

"What did you say was this young man's name?" he inquired of Xavier, when they had moved off a few steps.

"M. Le Mahouet. Did you ever meet him before this evening?"

"He is a fop!" replied Alphonse, shrugging his shoulders.

"Étienne a fop! Not he—you must be dreaming, my good fellow," said Xavier, unable to express the thoughts these words awakened in his heart.

"Well, it is no matter about that now; let us talk of something else. Oh! she is entrancingly

beautiful, and her father is a very nice, agreeable gentleman. Questioning me as to my tastes, my occupations, my opinions on various subjects, he seemed quite pleased with my answers."

"It is certainly most fortunate for you," said Xavier, with a sigh. "So, you are satisfied?"

"Satisfied? Say rather that I am delighted, transported!"

"And the marriage then is decided?"

"On my side, certainly."

"I don't doubt that," said Xavier smiling, "but is it decided on their part?"

"I feel almost sure that it is, although I know nothing positive as yet. I have already paid my respects to the lady, and I have really been inspired in saying most agreeable things to her. I have spoken to her of the pleasure of visiting the poor—"

Xavier started involuntarily, and casting a severe glance at Alphonse said, "It is all very well to say pretty things before marriage provided one intends to repeat them afterwards."

"Oh! I assure you I shall allow her to do just as she pleases, in regard to alms-giving, provided she is reasonable. I will even go to Mass with her. She shall have no cause of complaint. You see, my dear fellow, that I am completely captivated."

"So much the better. You know that no one

desires your happiness more earnestly than myself."

"Yes, you are a good fellow, and I am devoted to you."

"Poor Alphonse!" sighed M. de Bois Rougés.

"Ah! why has he directed our steps in this quarter?"

The answer to this question needed not the assistance of words; for a glance was far superior to any verbal description in a rapid analysis of the wealth of delicacies temptingly set out upon silver trays. After partaking of the family dinner at his aunt's, Alphonse was not disposed to be indifferent to the pleasures of this gastronomic display immediately under his eye. On the contrary, his sympathy with what was going on around him found vent in the following words,

"Take some of this iced punch, Xavier, it is delicious."

"Yes, thank you, I will," was the reply.

"Ah! here are sandwiches; these are famous. I am going to pass you one."

"No, I thank you, I am not hungry."

"One is always hungry for a sandwich, just try this."

"No, I want nothing more."

"You anchorite! . . . But my good fellow, you have just come, have you not? I have been

here a long time, and I saw nothing of you until you touched me on the arm."

"I arrived about a quarter of an hour ago. Ah! I was strongly tempted to impatience."

"You!" exclaimed Alphonse, laughing. "How did that happen?"

"My uncle De Bois Rougés, the one who lives in Rambouillet, came in unexpectedly, in the early part of the evening, to consult us about some changes he desires to make in his property. I was caught at home. It was absolutely necessary for me to remain, and take part in the consultation. My uncle seemed to have great difficulty in coming to a decision, for no matter what suggestion I made, he contrived to find some objection, and consequently, the whole ground of discussion had to be gone over again. I dared not leave lest I wound his feelings; and seeing no prospect of the conversation coming to an end very soon, I really felt worried at thoughts of the annoyance this delay must cause my poor friend, Le Mahouet."

"He is very sensitive then, is he, this friend of yours?"

"One need not be very sensitive to feel worried at such a delay when circumstanced as he is. He is poor, courageous, industrious, and the support of his whole family. I was to present him this evening to the Marquise de Valbret, with the

intention of enlisting her influence in his behalf with her brother-in-law, M. de Brian, who is one of the ministers of state."

"Your friend wishes to be First President, I suppose?"

"No, answered Xavier in a tone of displeasure, "he seeks an humble and laborious situation in one of the departments of the ministry.

"Indeed!" said Alphonse, "picking up a glass, "I am glad it is not myself."

"I cannot understand why you seem so ill-disposed towards him."

"I do not like him, answered Alphonse somewhat curtly, as he finished emptying the white shell all impregnated with an exotic perfume.

"I am sorry for that, on your account," said Xavier very gently, "for let me tell you, I cannot but think that you are in the wrong."

"Possibly. I shall be obliged to you however, not to bring me in contact with this young man," added Alphonse rising, "his position—"

Xavier smiled.

"His position!" he exclaimed. "I can tell you that he belongs to a family superior to our own."

"No matter, my dear fellow, he does not suit me."

"Oh! make your mind easy on that point, I will not bring you in contact with him."

"I beg you not even to speak to him of me."

"What severity!"

"What difference does it make to you? I really wish you would promise me not to mention my name to him."

"Oh! willingly. You must admit, Alphonse, that you certainly don't stop half way in your antipathies."

Alphonse made no reply.

"That is all very well;" continued Xavier, "but do tell me why you have not yet pointed out to me your betrothed, during all the time we have been talking here together?"

The word betrothed brought a smile to Alphonse's face.

"Ah! since I am thus wandering around melancholy, do you not see that she is far from me;"

"She has left already? I regret it. I wished to make her acquaintance, and be able to tell my mother and Marguerite something about her."

"Well, my dear, you are going to be satisfied. She and her father are in the apartments of Mme. de Valbret, who desired M. Vangaramenghen to see a Velasquez that is much admired. To tell the truth, I really think that the Marquise (who, by the way, is a woman of most commanding presence, so much so that I was deeply impressed),"—

"You are right," answered Xavier, "and if you

knew her better you would see what a kind heart is concealed under this majestic appearance."

"I am not surprised to hear it. She gave me a cordial welcome. But, as I was saying, I do think that a woman who has mingled with the cream of society like the Marquise de Valbret, ought to have known better than to have taken M. and Mlle. Vangaramenghen away from the rest of the assemblage, for over an hour."

"An hour!"

"Yes, it is more than an hour and a quarter since they left the drawing-room to look at this Velasquez, and, I suppose, the rest of the collection."

"It is strange," thought Xavier, "Mme. de Valbret has no collection of paintings. My dear Alphonse," he continued, "I ask you to present me as soon as you can, to the family with whom you expect to identify yourself. Meanwhile, I must leave you, for I cannot remain away from M. Mahouet any longer. When the Marquise reappears, I shall take Étienne to her at once. I do not think that our conversation (that is, Étienne's and mine,) with her will be long, and whilst proving myself a true friend to him, on the one hand, I may also find means of being a faithful cousin."

"Oh! I was so glad to see you."

"And I was glad to see you. This morning, I

had not the faintest idea of being a witness of this solemn interview."

"After while, we will—"

"Very well, I understand."

"Stop a minute ; just look at my aunt ! She points (like a good hunting-dog,) at the door behind which she saw the Marquise and Mlle. Renée disappear."

"What !" said Xavier laughing, "is this the way you speak of your mediatrix, your good genius?"

"Oh ! my dear fellow ! just guess if you can," replied Alphonse, taking hold of Xavier's arm, "her bill of fare at the festive dinner welcoming me to her house !"

"Let me go, indeed you must, Alphonse ; some other time you can tell me all that. I must return to M. Le Mahouet."

"Just one word more."

Ere this one word could be uttered, the tapestry covering the entrance to the little parlor was raised, and Mme. de Valbret appeared, holding Renée by the hand. The Marquise was smiling ; the young girl's eyes were moist with tears, but it was evident that her emotions were those of joy. M. Vangaramenghen following immediately upon their footsteps, parted with them as soon as they entered the drawing-room, and was soon lost amid the groups engaged in conversation here and there throughout the room, thus

leaving to the Marquise the care of reconducting Renée to her stepmother.

At sight of Renée and the Marquise, Alphonse forgot all about the one word which he had just been so anxious for his cousin to hear, and said eagerly,

“Look, Xavier, there they are !”

Turning in the direction indicated, the latter perceived Renée, and something like a shock passed through his frame as he recognized her.

“She !” he murmured.

“What !” thought he, “is it possible that this young girl of ardent prayer, of eloquent tears, this young girl whose pure, Christian soul is reflected in the chaste, poetic beauty of her face, must be sacrificed in marriage to a man utterly incapable of a serious idea, a stranger to the least devotion, careless as to everything even the salvation of his soul !” Ah ! the indifference and levity of modern times know well how to form such unions !”

“Unhappy child !” sighed Xavier, “she will die of grief !”

“Don’t you think she will be an honor to me ?” whispered Alphonse.

“Yes,” answered Xavier, coldly, turning to leave. He had caught Mme. de Valbret’s eye, and he hastened to rejoin Étienne.

"Pardon me," said he to the latter, "meeting my cousin here unexpectedly, circumstances forced me into a long conversation with him. I am now at your service. There is the Marquise de Valbret—the lady on our right, dressed in black velvet. Have you no acquaintance whatever with her?"

"I saw her last year, at one of Père Monsabré's conferences, but as I was some distance from her, I should not have recognized her again."

Xavier thought his friend's manner was somewhat absent-minded.

"Do not get nervous," said Xavier to him, "or feel ill at ease in thinking of this interview with the Marquise; she is a person of charming simplicity."

Instinctively, he followed Étienne's glance towards the two ladies who had walked the length of the room. . . . Ah! it was not upon the Marquise that Étienne's glance was fixed.

"Come," said M. de Bois Rougés, "let us hasten to the Marquise, before she is taken possession of by other guests. She saw me, I am sure; and it is likely that she was coming to us."

Saying this, he directed his steps towards the little parlor, the door of which always so rigorously kept closed, he was surprised to find open on a festive occasion like this.

“It is in this room that the Marquise is to receive us,” said Xavier to his friend, showing him the entrance to the dear sanctuary. “I dare not introduce you into it; and I much regret this, for I should like you to look at the portrait of Jean de Valbret. I repeat it, dear Étienne, you must speak to the Marquise with perfect confidence; don’t be afraid to open your heart to her, and express yourself unreservedly upon whatever subject she questions you, even as to your opinion of the various persons whose aid you hope to obtain in carrying out your plans, as this will enable her the better to judge of their character, her sole motive in questioning you about them. Mme. de Valbret is a woman whose piety comprehends all the delicacies of tact and discretion. You will feel your heart warmed and encouraged by her words,—I—”

Interrupting himself, he said, “I was sure she would give us her immediate attention.”

And indeed the Marquise approached. The two young men advanced towards her.

“Madame,” said Xavier, “here is M. Le Mahouet who wishes to say that he has already much to thank you for.”

“Is that so, Monsieur?” answered the Marquise smiling, as Étienne made a profound inclination before her.

“Certainly, Madame. I am deeply grateful for

the favor of being permitted to tender you my respects in person."

"Would to God I were able to add more substantial favors," answered Mme. de Valbret, "for you must know, Monsieur, that I am always ready to assist a friend of Xavier de Bois Rougés." This time it was the young Viscount who made a courteous inclination to the Marquise. "Will you follow me?" continued the latter. "You know, Xavier, that the consultation is to be held in the depths of my hermitage."

They entered the little parlor. It was lighted by a single lamp veiled in gauze. Through the Aubusson portière, which the Marquise let down as she entered, one heard the mingled voices of the gay throng in the grand drawing-room, like the murmuring of peaceful billows beating against the shore. On leaving that brilliantly lighted apartment with its festive appointments, its animated groups, its sounds of merriment, one experienced a sudden impression of rest and refreshment in this quiet peaceful spot, seemingly wrapped in the mantle of twilight, and just far enough removed from the surrounding festivities to beget a keen appreciation of the comparative silence reigning here.

Mme. de Valbret, taking the easy-chair she was accustomed to occupy, invited the young men to be seated.

"I suppose you told M. Mahouet to bring a number of references, did you not, Xavier?" said the Marquise.

"Yes, Madame, and he has complied most scrupulously with your request."

Before proceeding any farther in the matter, I must ask you, not him, for a little enlightenment on a certain point."

"And what is it, Madame?"

"When I entered the drawing-room, you were talking with a young man who was invited to my house this evening, for the first time. You seem to be on very familiar terms with each other. Is he a mere chance acquaintance, whom you met here, did you know him before, or, are you in any way connected with him?"

"I have been connected with him, Madame, ever since I was born; and so strong are the bonds uniting us that neither he nor I could break them, even if we wished to do so. This young man is my first cousin."

"This M. de Montpollin your cousin? how is that?"

"Pardon me," said Xavier with a smile playing around his lips, "he has another name, Gauthier, that also of my mother."

"Ah!" replied Mme. de Valbret, "now I understand. Are you very intimate?"

"Yes, Madame."

“Even to the extent of mutual confidence?”

“Sometimes.”

Reflecting a moment the Marquise continued, “Xavier, do you know the secret of that young man’s being here, this evening?”

“Yes, Madame, I know it.”

“Ah! indeed!”

“I did not think that—”

“Well, never mind that now. Listen to me. I must begin however by telling you something which you will be very sorry to hear. This evening whilst the company was assembling, I heard from the minister, to whom I had written in behalf of M. Mahouet. He sent the answer by his secretary, in token of his regard for me, and desired to comply with my request. But alas! pleasing as was the form of his message, the substance of it remained unchanged, and I am truly pained to tell you, Monsieur,” she continued turning to Étienne, “that the vacancy in the department has been filled.”

“Ah! my poor friend!” exclaimed Xavier.

An expression of pain passed over Étienne’s countenance; but making a brave effort at self-control, he said,

“I cannot help feeling the disappointment. Madame, I see now that I was rash in allowing myself to hope at all in the matter. Let me say to you, Madame, that I shall be greatly assisted in

bearing this disappointment, by the remembrance of the kindness which this circumstance has permitted me to receive from you."

"And what have I done for you? nothing but make known your desire. I myself had strong hopes for you; and I had really rejoiced in advance at your success. I cannot remain satisfied without making an effort to obtain something for you. Do you not know of some other position, Monsieur, that might suit you?"

"No, Madame, I know of none."

"Yes, but perhaps I may think of something."

"Oh! how kind you are! how I thank you!" exclaimed Xavier. "These few words of yours have excited my hopes anew."

"Don't be too fast now," said the Marquise, "especially after having been too slow."

"Oh! perhaps it was my fault, that he missed the appointment," murmured Xavier sadly.

"No, my dear child, it was not; the appointment was made yesterday morning."

"To assist your researches, Madame, I must tell you that Étienne is timid and mis-trustful of self, and that he is either unconscious of his talents, or, greatly undervalues them."

"All this is in the order of true merit. And guess, Xavier, what I am going to exact of you, in attestation of your words of affection and devotedness?"

The young man's clear gaze was fixed a moment on the face of the Marquise.

"I do not know what it is," he answered, "but I am ready to second any measure that may prove serviceable to my friend. What is it, Madame, that you wish!"

"I desire to—to be left alone with M. Mahouet so as to have a little private conversation with him,—an annoying request, I must confess, to make of you, Xavier."

Xavier arose laughing.

"A cruel request," he answered, "but one easily complied with. I am going to take myself off, but I shall not go far, and when I am no longer a restraint upon you—"

"You are no restraint whatever; you might even be able to assist us with your good judgment; but I, my child, in the matter I propose discussing with your friend, I would be a restraint upon you; and indeed your position under the circumstances would be a painfully embarrassing one, did I not take the liberty of asking you to retire for a while."

Xavier directed his steps towards the door opening into the vestibule.

"I am, at least free," he said, "am I not, to select the road leading into my exile? I should prefer not having to walk through the drawing-room in reaching the entrance here, whence

I await the word recalling me to your presence."

"Do as you wish in that respect," said Mme. de Valbret, "it makes no difference whatever."

Xavier now disappeared, followed by the wistful glances of his friend, who mystified like himself, and feeling more and more disheartened, longed to call him back yet dared not.

The young Viscount was too well acquainted with Mme. de Valbret not to feel considerably buoyed up as to Étienne's prospects by the Marquise's suggestion. She was not a woman to speak lightly or unadvisedly, and when striving to impart consolation, maladroitly to awaken new hopes that could only be blighted. She certainly had something in view, and Étienne, would not leave her presence with drooping spirits. But Étienne was so poor a judge when called upon to decide for himself! He even mistrusted his talents when he perceived himself passed over by the world's favor, so often bestowed upon others rather as the result of intrigue and sharpness than the reward of merit. On the other hand, he exaggerated his physical strength; and great, invincible courage was the prop sustaining his rather delicate constitution under the burden and strain of life's duties.

"If Mme. de Valbret mentions any employment exacting unintermitting labor, he will cer-

tainly accept," said Xavier anxiously. "There is consolation in the thought, that if his clients do not enrich him, they at least afford him a living. . . . But why should Mme. de Valbret send me out of the room?" he continued. "What can she fear from me? This is indeed mysterious."

Abandoned to these reflections he returned to the drawing-room, and having no desire to talk, he kept aloof from the animated groups around him, and remained standing alone against the wall, his eyes wandering listlessly over the scene, as often happens when one's mind is preoccupied. Suddenly, they fell upon the spot where Mme. Vangaramenghen, Mme. de Grenaff and a few others were seated engaged in conversation. His thoughts were immediately wrested from Étienne, and a feeling of sadness again took possession of his heart.

"What a beautiful expression this young Renée has!" said he. "What must not be the strength of that soul when its serenity is so soon reflected on the countenance, just bathed in bitter tears! Alas! poor young girl, guard your peace, guard your energy, for the tears I saw you shed, will not be the last to flow from your eyes!"

He had no longer any desire to be presented to her by Alphonse. He was even pleased to catch a glimpse of his cousin's blond head at the

farther end of the drawing-room, amid a group of young men with whom he (Alphonse) had entered into conversation, and whom he was entertaining gaily, judging by the continuous laughter greeting all his words.

“He fears to remain too long near Mlle. Vangaramenghen,” said Xavier, “and he is right. It is much better to announce the marriage than to have it divined. He does not see me ; so much the better. I shall not budge from this spot.”

Thoughtless project ! vain resolution ! Whilst Xavier, filled with anxiety for Étienne, and compassion for Renée, thus let his thoughts wander at will from one to the other, an eye was fastened upon him, noting the sad expression so clearly visible in his countenance, and interpreting it thus :

“This poor M. de Bois Rougés is evidently very unhappy ! I must try to assuage the pangs of his martyrdom a little. Oh ! how I am going to catch him ! He is very sharp, I have no doubt, but I defy him to escape the net-work, I intend to weave around him. Mme. de Valbret must have invited him, as I did not know that he was to be here. Knowing the intimacy existing between aunt and the Bois Rougés family, how is it I failed to comprehend aunt’s allusions immediately ? He is a most charming person, ‘St. Xavier,’ as my husband calls him ! Nor is Renée

less so. . . . Yes, they are admirably suited. What will aunt say when I tell her, that without one word of assistance, I have succeeded in penetrating the mystery which she wished me to unravel? . . . But what reason can they all have in keeping this coming marriage such a secret, not even allowing the poor groom elect to approach the object of his dreams, but forcing him to regard her from a distance? Oh! he may well sigh! This is just like what one reads in romances. . . . M. de Bois Rougés?"

Xavier, at the sound of his name, raised his head, and turning, saw Mme. de Broz beside him, looking so mischievous, that in spite of himself, he felt imbued with sentiments akin to her own.

"What are you doing here, all alone, like a plaintive shadow?" said she.

"In the first place, Madame, let me remark that so far from opening my lips in murmurs or complaints, I have not said one word."

"But there is a silence which is very eloquent, there are looks which moan and supplicate. . . . Give me your arm, if you please. If I did not know that you have great reason for being absent-minded this evening, I should reproach you for not having thought of offering me your arm."

"You are right, Madame, for I have been culpably remiss on this point."

Offering his arm which the young woman took, the two moved on a few steps, Mme. de Broz delighted, and Xavier acknowledging to himself that, under present circumstances, he could very well have dispensed with so flattering a preference.

"I have some revelations to disclose to you," said Mme. de Broz. "I shall begin by telling you that I have recently made great progress in many things."

"All humanity should imitate you, or, at least, endeavor to do so, Madame."

"Those who have not the same incentives and aids to progress as myself are excusable on this point. Do you know that I form one of the members of an embassy?"

"Certainly."

"Ah, indeed!" This is my first step, thought Mme. de Broz. She continued aloud, "I have become as skilful in diplomacy as ever Cardinal Richelieu was."

"Madame, I congratulate you on selecting Cardinal Richelieu as your model, rather than our contemporaries."

"Ah! what a conclusion you have drawn from my words! I did not mean to speak ill of our statesmen."

"That would not be politic."

"Oh! how astute you are! But I think I sur-

pass you. Oh ! what a woman's eye can penetrate! I never could imagine why our grammarians should have put lynx in the masculine gender."

"Do not be too exacting of justice. There are so many words which grammarians make feminine,—gentleness, wisdom, etc."

Mme. de Broz laughed heartily. Xavier from time to time, looked towards the door, but in vain,—nothing as yet recalled him to the side of Étienne Le Mahouet.

"Second step in the path of progress," continued the young woman, "I have become so discreet, that on discovering a secret, whilst doing my best for those it concerns, I never betray them."

"Permit me to say, Madame, that this laudable science seems to me a necessary outgrowth of diplomacy. The true diplomatist must be as impenetrable as he is clear-sighted."

"Now, my third step in the path of progress—, a progress truly worthy of the name, is one which makes me a diplomatist unique! Ability and cleverness ordinarily dry up the fountains of the heart; but my diplomatic talents render me compassionate and desirous to serve others, consoling them, and alleviating the sufferings which the severity of circumstances may inflict upon them. . . . Why are you so inclined to di-

rect your steps towards the right? It is towards the left I wish you to go."

"Willingly, Madame."

"Very willingly, I imagine. Come now, just a little courage. I must have a few moment's talk with Mlle. Vangaramenghen. Will you conduct me to her?"

"Yes, Madame."

"He has not winced once under my words, nor betrayed the least emotion," thought the young woman. "He is more impenetrable than I suspected." They directed their steps toward Renée, who remained silent and with downcast eyes, whilst her stepmother and Mme. de Grenaff kept up a most animated conversation. The young girl was certainly greatly pre-occupied, for Mme. de Broz and Xavier stood before her ere she had noticed their approach.

"Renée," said the former, "I have been so tyrannical as to make M. de Bois Rougés bring me to you."

Recalled to herself, Renée raised her eyes to meet the young man's look, which was one of gentleness and deep sympathy. She immediately recognized Xavier, as him whom she had seen on bended knee, his face reflecting the ardor of a soul inflamed with devotion, when desolate and almost heart-broken, she had gone to seek courage at the martyrs' tomb. Over her

face and Xavier's passed one of those smiles by which two souls that know they are sisters salute each other; then, the young girl courteously inclined her head, not venturing to say aught to this stranger, and feeling that he had understood her. Mme. de Broz regarded each in turn.

"Pass me that chair, my dear Monsieur," said she. "As I believe that you wish to be a faithful cavalier to me, I invite you also to take a seat."

Mme. Vangaramenghen and Mme. de Grenaff, interrupted the course of their conversation. They listened to Mme. de Broz, they eyed Xavier curiously, they whispered to each other. Under their long golden lashes, the stepmother's eyes cast forth glances of defiance; whilst those of the Baroness, on the contrary, gleamed like those lights which in the hour of shipwreck betoken peril.

"I told you there was something under this," murmured Mme. de Grenaff so low that no one but Mme. Vangaramenghen could hear her. "I knew very well that they were not looking at a portrait one whole hour. Renée's manner and tone were changed after that when Alphonse returned to her. This young man's face is familiar to me, and I feel sure that I am acquainted with him."

"He is fine looking, indeed, he has the air

of a prince," was the charitable reply of her friend.

"I certainly know him," repeated the Baroness, now greatly agitated.

Suddenly, she nudged the elbow of Mme. Vangaramenghen, and drawing nearer to her, whispered,

"Ah! I know. It is the young Viscount de Bois Rougés, my nephew's first cousin."

"Viscount!" replied the stepmother, "He has a title then?"

"I will confer my title upon my nephew, as I have already told you, have I not? I intend to adopt Alphonse."

"No, I never heard you say so before."

"But I assure you, I did tell you; you may not have heard or understood me."

"You talk so much I can't hear what he says to Renée, and I am anxious to catch his words."

Mme. de Grenaff, at this likewise essayed a slight movement forward. But vain attempt! Mme. de Broz pleased at having played her part so well, and not wishing to push matters farther, now sustained the conversation herself, Renée's and Xavier's share in it being limited to the polite yet indifferent monosyllabic replies which they made to her words. This situation could not be prolonged, and Xavier would soon have put an end to it, had not courtesy forbidden his

interrupting Mme. de Broz's narrations. At last, a moment's respite permitted him to rise.

"I beg you to excuse my leaving you, Madame," said he, "but Mme. de Valbret wished to see me this evening, and I fear she may be kept waiting."

Mme. de Grenaff crushed the border of her fan. . . . Mme. de Broz perceiving that the two young people had been prudent even to excess, replied to him in an undertone,

"So, Monsieur, you leave Renée's presence without having said one word to her."

As this remark was made so as to be heard by Renée, Xavier could no longer intrench himself behind a complete silence. With a respectful inclination to her, he said,

"Mlle. Vangaramenghen, will readily pardon me, Madame, I am sure, since your pleasant words have made up for my deficiency in the way of conversation, and she has been a gainer by the exchange."

"And this is how you thank me!" exclaimed Mme. de Broz. "It is shameful in you!"

Laughing, Xavier with a respectful bow, took leave of the ladies, and hastened to the spot where he had been standing when Mme. de Broz accosted him.

"What can the Marquise be talking about to Alphonse, all this time?" he asked himself. A

moment after, a hand touched him roughly, and turning he saw Alphonse.

"Oh! it is you, is it?" said Xavier.

The person addressed made no reply, but purple in the face, stood looking at Xavier with an air of consternation.

"What is the matter? what has happened to you?" continued Xavier.

"How dare you ask me? Was there ever such a betrayal of confidence? Only to think that after all I told you!"

"What has taken possession of you?" replied Xavier quietly. "I have spoken to no one of your expected marriage."

"My marriage! ah! this is too much! My marriage, indeed! Aunt has just warned me of you, and your recent behavior. She has had some talk with the little lady who accompanied you, and who seemed to be in your confidence."

"What is that?"

"Oh! yes, I know it, I saw it, I—"

"But what is it you saw? Please do tell me."

"Anybody but myself would challenge you for this."

"You have certainly gone crazy. I beg you to explain yourself."

"You too are a suitor for the hand of Mlle. Vangaramenghen! And her choice between us, forsooth, would soon be made: you are rich."

“I seek the hand of Mlle. Vangaramenghen! I!”

And at this, Xavier was seized with a fit of laughter so impulsive, so irresistible, that all the assertions, all the explanations which he could have made were of slight account in comparison. Every vestige of a doubt as to the sincerity of his words and his surprise must needs have been removed by it. Recovering himself, for a moment, he wiped his eyes, but was again overcome by laughter. Alphonse's fury suddenly disappeared before it even as a breath of wind.

“This is stupid indeed;” he murmured. “To have given me such a scare!”

“Oh,” said Xavier, when he was able to speak, “do re-assure yourself, my dear fellow. I seek the hand of no one. Ah! I see now, the origin of all this—Mme. de Broz is at the bottom of it. I understand now all the mysterious allusions in her conversation, and why she conducted me to Mlle. Renée. . . . Her plan certainly succeeded as far as you are concerned.”

“What imagination can do!”

Then, in a grave tone he continued,

“Alphonse, I must tell you that I am very much offended, at your giving credit, even for an instant, to so injurious a suspicion against me. My part, I trust, will always be an honorable one!”

“O! forgive me, my dear, good friend;” replied Alphonse, covered with confusion. “In the first moment of . . . just think if I were to miss this marriage! One does not find so desirable a match twice in a lifetime.”

“Alas!” sighed Xavier, “that this should be the thought that grieves him! You need have no fear of me,” he continued aloud. “Give me your hand, and please present my compliments to your aunt. I shall get after Mme. de Broz for this.”

“Xavier, I really have great confidence in you.”

“Yes, you have just given me a striking proof of it.”

“Were you offended?”

“Very much; but I forgive you.”

“I intend sitting here by you, it will be time enough after a while to re-assure my aunt. I should have preferred returning to these ladies; but Mlle. Renée says not a word to me, and whilst her stepmother wishes me to talk, my aunt looks at me with the eyes of a vulture—”

“Why is this?”

“Because I wanted to relate”—

One of those lively, puerile anecdotes of which Alphonse always had a full stock which he delighted to retail, now convinced Xavier that his cousin's lost equanimity was restored. The young Viscount listened patiently, but without being

over scrupulous as to attention; and from time to time, looking at his watch, he would murmur,

"How long they do talk!" At last, he said, "Alphonse, let us go nearer the door. I wish to be in readiness to enter at the first signal."

Alphonse made no reply but quietly followed him.

Had they turned their glances in the direction of the groups from which they had withdrawn, both of them would have been moved, but in a very different manner.

* * * * *

The Marquise began thus the mysterious dialogue which she had expressed a desire to have with M. Le Mahouet.

"I am not sure that we need be so grieved at our disappointment. The situation you applied for, Monsieur, is a most laborious one."

Étienne smiled faintly at these words.

"Hard work does not frighten me much, Madame," said he, "provided I am competent to respond faithfully to the confidence reposed in me by those under whom I work."

"I must tell you, that every day without intermission, and for many hours of each day, you would have been kept away from your home. And, if I rightly understood Xavier, one dear object of your affection would suffer from your continual absence."

“Yes, alas!” said the young man sighing, “you are right, Madame. It is this thought which has so long combated my intention of seeking some fixed position. My profession (I am a lawyer) does allow me to find a few moments to bestow upon my old mother. I cannot but see the isolation to which she will be condemned when I am forced to be away from our home nearly the whole day; and this is why I have struggled as long as I could against the sad necessity of seeking a position requiring it. But the time seemed to have come when I must forego my inclinations, and yield to what I deemed a duty.”

These last words were uttered in a tone so low and so sad, that in their proud reserve, they revealed the extremity before which the affection of two courageous hearts had succumbed.

“But,” inquired the Marquise, “have you not sisters?”

“I have two sisters, Madame, but they are still too young to be taken away from the convent, without compromising their education.”

“Oh! that would be a great pity, and it must not be dreamed of. Yet being old myself and having suffered much, I am filled with sympathy for this poor old mother still with you, and I should love to arrange all things that you could enjoy at the same time, the pecuniary advantages which

you seek, and those consolations of affection, that by a mutual sentiment of devotion both you and she had determined to sacrifice, if necessary."

"Madame," exclaimed Étienne, "if aided by your powerful influence, such a project could be realized, you would indeed become the guardian angel of my poor grandmother's old age."

"Were it only to merit so beautiful a title, I should attempt it, Monsieur. But to succeed my plan exacts your hearty co-operation."

"Madame, can you doubt it?"

"Your filial love and devotion? Oh! no. But holding at my disposal what I have just referred to, and knowing you worthy of accepting it, I still hesitate to make the offer."

"Madame," said Etienne anxiously, yet not daring to ask the Marquise for an explanation of her words, "you have only to name the offer, for me to meet it."

"No, I only hope that you will accept it. I do not feel sure that you will."

And as the young man regarded her with astonishment,

"You know," she continued, "that there are recesses in the soul, refuges for self ever closed to a stranger; and before proceeding a step farther in the question which we are now considering, I must be authorized to do so."

“There are also kindnesses to which one accords rights that would be refused to other sentiments,” replied Étienne with a dignity that delighted the Marquise. “I am entirely at your service, Madame.”

“Well, it seems to me that instead of wearing yourself out in incessant toil, condemning yourself to continual suffering and anxiety, you could enlarge your circle, and obtain of the purest affections, not only the aid which you require, but even an increase of happiness.”

“I am not sure that I understand you,” murmured Étienne.

“Oh, yes, you understand me perfectly. But let me develop my suggestion a little. What joy would it not be for Mme. de Lagareue to have the constant society of a young woman, pretty and gentle, who would take the place of that dear daughter, too soon called hence by death! what joy for her to behold that last crown of maternity named grandchildren, to bless these new scions of herself! what joy for her to know ere descending to the grave that your future was secure!”

Étienne shook his head.

“All that you now say to me, Madame, I have often repeated to myself; yet I have no desire to marry.”

“Permit me to tell you that you are wrong.

With your excellent habits, your honorable character, your refinement, you would make a good woman happy, and be happy yourself in marrying."

Étienne's face was clouded as he replied, "No, I have no desire to marry. Nevertheless, Madame, I thank you for your kindness."

"Do not use that word kindness any longer, I beg of you. It suited well enough when I endeavored to do my best in seconding the efforts of M. de Bois Rougés in your behalf. Now, that I have seen you and known you, say 'your affection' instead of 'your kindness,'—you will thus favor me by doing so."

"Ah! Madame!"

"Why are you so astonished? It is your good that I desire."

Étienne was deeply touched. This woman who had received him at her house this evening for the first time was now speaking to him as to a friend; and the conversation which he had anticipated as hedged in with all the formality of a most rigid etiquette, had been transformed into a confidential talk, and with so much delicacy, so much regard for his feelings, that whilst rapidly drawn to questions altogether different from those he had come hither to discuss, he could neither complain of it, nor intrench himself behind an excessive reserve.

So it is a settled thing then," continued Mem. de Valbret, "that you will never marry."

"It is probable, Madame, that I shall not."

"Ah! it is not sure?"

"I should have said that I am sure I shall not."

"No, our first words always give the most correct impression of our thoughts. From what has escaped you, I draw one evident conclusion—that it is not marriage itself to which you are opposed."

"Madame"—

"Oh! you must now let me make use of, or even abuse the privilege I asked and which you granted."

"Madame," said Étienne, "the Marquise de Valbret has given proofs so multiplied of her kind heart and consideration for others, that I have no fears whatever in becoming the object of her favorable attentions."

"I feel confident that my plans will meet with your warmest approval. My child—you will allow me to call you thus, will you not?"

Étienne inclined his head, and passed his hand over his forehead.

"My child, the thought of marriage is not displeasing to you, and yet you will never marry, you say. How is this?"

"I will never sell my heart."

"And you fear that you may never be able to offer it according to your inclinations, because adversity has visited your family, and made the material side of your existence such as you would shrink from asking a young girl of your own rank to share?"

There was no reply.

"Yet an ideal must some time have passed before your eyes."

Étienne started and suddenly raised his head.

"What do you mean, Madame?" he exclaimed?

"Listen to me. You are free, at present, perfectly free, and you can remain so if you wish. But if it suits you suddenly to exchange this liberty for a solemn word, that word would be welcome I can assure you. Give me your arm, for I want you to see the person of whom I speak."

Étienne almost staggered as he arose. Everything seemed so like a dream. Opening the drawing-room door, the Marquise in a perfectly calm, self-possessed manner, walked towards Renée, before whom she suddenly stopped and said,

"Here is a gentleman with whom you are acquainted. Have you not some inquiries to make of M. Le Mahouet?"

"I should be delighted to hear from Cécile," murmured the young girl in a trembling voice.

"She is very well, Mademoiselle," answered Étienne, in a manner still more confused than her own.

The Marquise continued,—

"You are very fond of Mlle. Le Mahouet, are you not, Renée? You love her as a sister?"

"Indeed I do, Madame."

Étienne's head swam; it seemed to him as if the very walls were trembling.

"To-morrow," continued Mme. de Valbret, "I wish to have a talk with your father, Renée, and I must ask M. Le Mahouet to let me have his arm on that occasion. Will you be sure to charge yourself with my little message, and request M. Vangaramenghen to accord us this interview?"

Renée inclined her head, and a timid *yes* issued from her lips like a faint breath.

"To-morrow, then," said the Marquise smiling, as she passed on, taking Étienne with her.

She heard him murmur,

"All this is surely a dream."

"A dream, believe me," said the Marquise, "from which you will not awaken. I feel interested in Renée's happiness."

* * * *

Just at this moment, Xavier again interrupted one of his cousin's anecdotes by these words,

"Étienne is certainly staying a very long time with Mme. de Valbret."

"Oh! there he is!" exclaimed Alphonse in amazement.

Xavier turned, and saw the Marquise, escorted by Étienne, coming towards them.

"He seems quite self-possessed,—that friend of yours," said Alphonse.

Xavier's countenance betrayed so much surprise that Alphonse continued,

"It is doubtless your protection that emboldens him. You did not expect so favorable a termination as appears evident just now, my good fellow."

Xavier advanced eagerly towards Mme. de Valbret. Alphonse, on the contrary, drew back. Most decidedly, he wished to keep aloof from Étienne.

"We were looking for you, Xavier," said the Marquise. "M. Le Mahouet will tell you that both he and I are much pleased. I leave him now to you, for he seems overcome. To-morrow my child," she continued, extending her hand to Étienne.

The latter seized this extended hand and pressed it to his lips. Xavier thought he heard a stifled sigh mingled with the kiss.

"Oh! thank God!" murmured the young Viscount.

"I resign your friend to you," repeated the Marquise; "he will tell you all."

The two young men retired apart, Alphonse from a distance seeing them disappear.

He now decided to return to the Mmes. Vangaramenghen, thinking it was nearly time for them to take leave, and longing to hear from Renée's lips the gentle good-bye which would soon be followed by words of deeper, tenderer import.

"Ah! there you are at last!" said the Baroness, fixing upon her nephew a look of despair.

"Aunt," whispered Alphonse, "It is not so—my cousin."

"Pshaw! he is out of the question. I fear him no longer; but there is another dread rival."

Then bending forward she said to the young girl,

"Does our dear Renée still suffer from the headache?"

"Yes, Madame," answered the latter, to whom the state of agitation in which she had been kept the whole evening, had indeed brought this succor. "As soon as my father comes this way I shall ask him to let us retire."

"Dear child! You are suffering. Let Alphonse go hunt your father up."

"No, Madame, I thank you. I prefer simply to wait until he comes."

The Baroness bit her lips. In a moment or two, she said a few words to Mme. Vangaramenghen.

"I tell you I do not know," answered the stepmother in the same tone as the query. "Ask your nephew if he can inform you?"

"Alphonse, who is that young man whose arm Mme. de Valbret had just now?"

"A poor wretch of a lawyer."

"What is his name?"

"M. Le Mahouet."

"Le Mahouet?" she murmured. "I wonder if he is one of the Le Mahouets connected with the Lagareuc family?"

"How do I know?" answered Alphonse, who began to share his aunt's anxiety. "I know that he works for a living, that's all I know about him."

Mme. de Grenaff again whispered some words to Mme. Vangaramenghen, whose only answer was a slight shrug of the shoulders.

Just at this moment the anxiety of the Baroness was intensified by an incident that came under her observation. The banker withdrew from the group with whom he had been engaged in conversation and came towards his wife. But ere doing so (how could this escape Mme. de Grenaff's eyes?) he said a few words, evidently expressive of his entire satisfaction, and courteously bore the tips of the Marquise de Valbret's fingers to his lips.

"It is late," said he, in a brief tone, to Mme. Vangaramenghen.

"It is hardly two o'clock," she answered, looking at Mme. de Grenaff.

"Monsieur," said Alphonse eagerly, "I should like very much to have the honor of another little talk with you, for a few moments."

"I regret not to be able to accord you these few moments, Monsieur; it is late, and I wish to retire."

Renée arose.

"Really, one might suppose the room was on fire," said Mme. Vangaramenghen. "Adrian, do give me time to whisper a word to you."

Advancing a step or two, she leaned over towards her husband and said something to him. His answer was a shake of the head. She responded by a gesture of impatience and, taking hold of his arm, spoke to him again. The same negative sign was renewed, accompanied by a few words, doubtless in self-justification, which immediately ended the debate. Mme. Vangaramenghen's hand let go his arm, and the banker very politely saluted Mme. de Grenaff, saying to her,

"I shall do myself the honor of coming to see you, Madame."

Merely replying to Alphonse's salutation, he turned to go, followed by his daughter and his wife, the Baroness catching on to the latter as one seizes a branch when an abyss opens before him.

"Oh! I am overcome. . . . It will kill Alphonse."

"What do you want me to do in the matter?"

"It is incomprehensible. What can be the cause of so sudden a change?"

"Not being a diviner I can't tell you."

"A child like Alphonse! who has so many qualifications! whose only fault is in being too good!"

"You are preaching to one who agrees with you, my dear; but you see, I have no voice in the question."

"Did he tell you nothing, nothing at all?"

An ironical smile passed over the young woman's face. She repressed it and assumed an air of gentle embarrassment.

"My dear friend, pray tell me what he said," continued the Baroness, "we are at least entitled 'to know the objection.'"

"What good would this do you? It would only pain and annoy you, perhaps."

"Yes, yes, tell me everything."

"We are powerless to remedy the matter."

"Oh! I beg of you!"

They had now reached the dressing-room, and were putting on their wraps. Alphonse, filled with consternation, stood waiting for his aunt at the door. This dialogue must come to an end.

"Well," said Mme. Vangaramenghen "since you insist upon it—"

"Yes, I positively insist."

"He said to me (and I had no reply to make, not knowing to what in especial he referred), " ' I shall not force my daughter to marry a man so selfish and ill-bred. I think I have found a better match for her ! ' Good-bye, my dear."

And leaving her friend in possession of this desirable (?) piece of information, Mme. Vangaramenghen darted off to rejoin her husband and Renée, who were already descending the staircase.

The Baroness stood a moment as if transfixed to the spot by Mme. Vangaramenghen's parting words. She felt crushed, annihilated. But this was of short duration, and had already given place to the surgings of a restrained fury when she took Alphonse's arm.

"Come," said she in a tone which was far from gracious.

When at last the two were rolling away in the hack which was to take them home, and there was no one but Alphonse to hear her words, the storm of wrath burst forth.

"You have only yourself to thank for this," said she. "How often did I not tell you that in this house you should be most prudent, decorous, circumspect—"

"What have I done!" exclaimed the unhappy Alphonse, clasping his hands. "I have said scarcely four words. I never was so serious in my life!"

"Simpleton!"

In this lugubrious conversation, Mme. de Grenaff forgot that she had been extolling her nephew as a most sensible person.

"Aunt," groaned the accused, "I—"

"Hush. M. Vangaramenghen had never seen you. He was delighted at thoughts of the marriage, and it stands to reason that he would not have changed his mind in the course of a few hours after seeing you, if you had not revealed to him some of your charming qualities."

Vainly did the young man run over in his mind all the incidents of this festive occasion, of too recent an occurrence indeed for anything to have escaped his memory.

"I have done nothing," he repeated, "I have done nothing amiss whatever. It was expressly in obedience to your wishes that I kept at a distance. Oh! to lose such a marriage! such a bride, and such a fortune!"

This last plaint was accompanied by a counterpart so perfect that one could readily believe in the good dispositions recently manifested by the Baroness, indicative of the spirit of union in a family.

“ Oh ! ” said she bitterly, “ when I noticed that prolonged private interview, and then saw this young man make his appearance— ”

“ But, aunt, I tell you that this part of it is false. Xavier never tells an untruth. ”

“ Pshaw ! I don't mean Xavier, he is in no way concerned ; I mean this M. Le Mahouet. ”

“ He ! ” exclaimed Alphonse, in a tone of contempt, “ he ! impossible, aunt, he is poor. ”

“ Are you rich ? ”

“ A man who seeks a clerkship ! ”

“ He certainly does better than you who are content to be a drone. ”

“ Aunt ! ”

“ To lose such a match ! Now you may try to get a wife without any assistance from me ! ”

“ But see here, ” said Alphonse, exasperated at last, “ how do you know that you see straight now, since just a few hours ago you saw cross-ways ? ”

“ How amiable my nephew is ! ” replied the Baroness, in a tone of irony far more expressive of her irritation than any reproaches she had hitherto uttered.

“ Who knows, ” continued Alphonse pushed to extremities, “ but that you were in some way or other the cause of the young girl's refusing me ? ”

“ Ah, this is too much ! ” screamed the aunt en-

raged beyond control. "If it were not night I should make you get out of this hack!"

"Oh!" sighed out the unhappy young man, with an effort to overcome himself, "forgive me, aunt, I hardly know what I say."

"Yes, yes," replied the Baroness. "Alas, my poor child, we are very unfortunate."

The plural pronoun here entered decidedly into Mme. de Grenaff's vocabulary. Did Alphonse understand it simply as an expression of sympathy for himself? Perhaps so. At any rate, he grew more calm, and so did the Baroness. The dialogue was now continued in a more peaceful manner.

"You really believe that it is this M. Le Mahouet who has supplanted me?"

"Yes, I am sure of it. I saw Renée smile when Mme. de Valbret conducted him to her, whilst her manner to you was freezing."

"Then why are you angry at me?"

"Because you must have done something amiss, which is the reason of the preference given this stranger over you."

"But with what do they reproach me?"

"With being selfish and ill-bred. It is this which made me say to you—"

The Baroness stopped suddenly. A marked *rallendtanto* followed by a state of complete immobility proved that they had reached the door

whence she and Alphonse had gone out so joyously just a few hours before.

"Here we are," said she. "Get out and ring the bell. I take cold very easily, and I am afraid to stand waiting for the door to be opened." Alphonse obeyed, and, when all was in readiness for her to descend, he saw his aunt, enveloped tightly in her wraps, dart out of the hack like a streak of lightning, and into the house.

"I expect you to-morrow at noon," she cried out to him in breathless haste as she flew past. He made no reply, but returning to the hack, and giving the driver his address, got in and slammed the door. With arms crossed and head bent, he sat musing, scarce knowing whether to indulge a last hope, tears or anger. All the realities just within his grasp, all the fancies he had been caressing the last few days, ruthlessly swept away before his eyes! Oh! it was terrible! Amidst this confusion two words of fearful import were ringing in his ears, "selfish, ill-bred!"

"It is incredible, upon my word it is," said he to himself. "Ill-bred! I, who am considered one of the most elegant young men of my province! Selfish indeed! I should like to know in what way? I ate just what she set before me without the least sign of complaint or dissatisfaction. . . . I am almost frozen now from waiting on her. I too was warm in the hack, as well as herself."

In spite of himself, his thoughts would incessantly travel back and forth between the moment of his appearance at his aunt's, and this which now saw him so desolate. The more he scanned his memory, the stronger the verdict of innocence such examination afforded him. At last, this most anxious thought, overleaped the limitations of time, apparently so just, within which it had been restrained. "Selfish and ill-bred!" It is a singular thing indeed that these words were truly applicable to him in connection with a certain incident of the day! And also strange that the person who had supplanted him should be this M. Le Mahouet! . . . But, pshaw! how absurd! This act in itself was not of sufficient importance to lead to such results. Moreover, how could the Marquise have heard it? for it was not to be supposed that the young man, a stranger introduced to her by a friend, told her. To have done so would certainly have been prejudicial to himself. No confidence, no recompense especially, follows a revelation in which one sings his own praises to the discredit of another. Evidently, the little episode of the omnibus had no connection with the grand subject under consideration. Yet, on the other hand, by what prodigy of audacity and cunning had this poverty-stricken lawyer succeeded in causing the obscure employment which he

desired to transform itself into an opulent magnificent marriage? All was dark, mysterious! Suddenly an idea seized Alphonse, a terrible, suffocating idea! Away with it! he thought. A man must certainly be a fool to dwell upon it an instant. And yet it took complete possession of his mind, by degrees assuming startling distinctness of detail, and increasing in probability. . . . That tall, spare figure, that white hair, yes, even the very voice—all were identical. Oh! the mortification, the chagrin would nearly kill him should such a suspicion prove correct! But why this costume, and why riding in an omnibus? . . . Impossible! impossible! impossible!

But the phantom which had thus risen up before Alphonse heeded not this word of dismissal. It remained, becoming every moment more and more distinct. It descended from the hack with him, it ascended to his chamber, and it hung like a nightmare over the bed on which the bewildered young man vainly endeavored to snatch a few moments' sleep. He combated this obsession a long time, until finally, worn out arguing with self, he made the following resolution, the best thing assuredly that he could have done:

“As soon as possible to-morrow, I will go to see Xavier.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NEXT DAY.

How shall one describe the morrow, that arose upon this noble, impoverished family of Étienne Le Mahouet? Shall I speak of it as a ray of hope, the aurora of happiness? All terms and comparisons were inadequate to our purpose. There are joys which can be imagined, which can be felt, but never expressed in words.

Day was dawning in the east. The old mother still slept, thus obtaining a few hours' respite from suffering. Her hands remained clasped, just as they were when she had fallen asleep praying for her son, with whose name she now mingled that of the Marquise de Valbret.

Many times had her aged lips repeated, "Inspire him, O my God! Do Thou fill this powerful woman with sympathy for him! May his countenance reflect in her eyes the virtues that adorn his character."

At intervals, the anguish of fear was mingled with her supplications. What reason had she to hope that Étienne would receive the appointment? Had not Xavier de Bois Rougés pre-

sumed too much on the Marquise's kindness and friendship for himself? And even suppose she did warmly espouse Étienne's cause, would this ensure success? Alas! the realization of their hopes, which at first she had regarded as certain, now began to appear very doubtful when she pondered the matter and took into consideration all the attendant circumstances. And then back of this question rose up others so painful! . . . But again hope whispered in her ear, and she thought of "the birds of the air that neither sow nor reap, the lilies of the field arrayed in their spotless garments, and the heavenly Father who hath charge over all."

"Confidence, my poor heart, confidence;" murmured the invalid. "O my God, pardon me my weakness; Thou knowest well that the mother's heart is oftentimes very weak."

Uttering her "Fiat," she closed her eyes.

When she opened them again the pallid light of an autumn morn warned her that it was time for all to rise. Being able to move her hands, she slightly raised the curtain around her bed and called gently:

"Are you here, Anne Marie?"

Immediately, the curtain was raised all the way, and Étienne fell on his knees beside this bed of suffering, whence so many prayers and acts of immolation had ascended to heaven in his behalf

“Mother!” he exclaimed, “my dear mother!” unable at first to say another word. The invalid looked at him as if startled, and was puzzled to comprehend his meaning.

“Render thanks to God,” he continued.

“Render thanks to God, for what, my dear child, for what?”

She felt indeed that this was no question of material success, that had moistened Étienne’s eyes, and illumined his countenance with the light of joy.

Clasping her hands in his own, the young man kissed them.

“Mother,” said he, “in a very little while, I will not be kneeling here at your bedside alone. That dear Renée whom your tenderness, ever fearful for the happiness of your children, sought to banish from their memory, is going to be your daughter.”

“Ah! what do I hear?” exclaimed the invalid. “Étienne! my child! which of us is going crazy?”

“My beloved mother, what I tell you is no illusion, but a reality. Renée Vangaramenghen is to be my wife. Give me your blessing. A new life is opening for me and for you also.”

“O my son! why should I be astonished that the hour of recompense is come for you?” said the invalid, folding him in her motherly embrace;

—one of those silent embraces, fraught with the meaning of many words.

“How was this miracle wrought?” she said, at last.

“I really do not know. Just as we ascend, step by step, to the door of a palace, so did the Marquise de Valbret lead me by degrees to the consummation of which I have just told you,—a consummation expressed in these (to me) strange and unexpected words: ‘I wish Renée to be happy; receive her hand.’ ”

The aged mother wept, and the hand clasping Étienne’s trembled convulsively.

“Calm yourself, mother,” said the young man, almost as much affected as herself; “you who have been so courageous in adversity and suffering should know how to be equally strong in the presence of happiness.”

“O, my dear child, how just, how merciful is the good God!”

Étienne gently wiped from her furrowed cheeks the tears that bedewed them—the first tears of joy he had ever seen her shed, and seating himself near her bed he related in detail his visit to Mme. de Valbret,—a narration frequently interrupted by the exclamations of the invalid. When he had finished, she said in a voice broken by emotion :

“I must go to see her, I must see her! Since my poor paralyzed feet cannot take me to her, I

will have myself carried to her door, where she will find me as she passes out. I must bless her, I must—”

“You need not be taken there, mother. She herself is coming to-day to see us. She puts the finishing touch to her work by introducing me to M. Vangaramenghen.”

“Ah! how much it pains me to think that I cannot rise to welcome her.”

They remained thus a long time, giving vent to the joy that filled their hearts. The next few hours saw this humble abode the scene of earnest efforts to transform it into a reception room for the holy woman to whom its inmates felt indebted for the great and unexpected happiness which God had sent them. From time to time, the invalid would say aloud:

“The Marquise will soon be here, I feel it. Oh! if we now had some of the flowers that filled our gardens at Hermeus!”

Then again she would exclaim,

“Renée Vangaramenghen to be my daughter! It is too much joy, too much!”

And thus dwelling, now upon the dear subject so near her heart, and now upon the material cares demanding her attention, the aged mother saw the moments pass. At last, all was in readiness to receive the Marquise; and Mme. de Lagareuc, wearing a silk robe, the last remnant of

ancient splendor, and having around her neck an escutcheoned cross, the legacy of six generations, was extended in the invalid's chair, awaiting the arrival of the distinguished visitor, who came to salute her in the name of happiness. Poverty had hampered these material preparations, but the inspirations of the heart were impressed upon them. The round table covered with an Algerian veil, embroidered in gold, was set near the invalid. Before the book-shelf one saw a little screen on which was the figure of a young man, and a very young woman leaning against him as if seeking protection and support. Whilst the father and the mother of the orphans doubtless smiled on this scene from their home in heaven, was it not fitting that they be represented as participating in it on earth? Close by were the crucifix, and the statue of Our Lady, both of which had many times this morning been covered with kisses, even as in the days of trial, when aid and strength were too frequently implored from on high. Renée's medallion was hung around Our Lady's statue, the same tenderness which had formerly sought to conceal her from others now joyfully assigning her the place of honor.

"I will tell the Marquise that a portion of her heart has preceded her here," said Mme. Lagareuc.

It was almost noon, and the distinguished visitors so eagerly expected might appear at any moment. From time to time, Étienne would lean out of the only window that looked on the street, striving to apprise himself of her approach.

At last he said, "Here is the Marquise!"

And indeed, an equipage with grand armorial bearings stopped before the door, and the Marquise richly dressed as became a lady of her station descended from it. Étienne hastened to meet her and, leaning upon his arm, she walked up the high stairway. He begged her to excuse the steep ascent which she was obliged to make ere reaching their apartments. Her only response was a smile.

"How can I tell you, Madame," he said, "with what eagerness my mother has longed for this moment that is to make her acquainted with her to whom we owe so much!"

Again a smile flitted around Mme. de Valbret's lips.

The rustling of her silk dress as well as Étienne's steps announced their approach. They entered the room.

"Madame!" exclaimed the invalid, extending her obedient hands, the only limbs she could control.

The Marquise stopped and looked at her.

The invalid uttered a cry of joy.

"You! Oh! is it you!"

She opened her arms and Mme. de Valbret was pressed to her heart.

"Yes, it is I, I who so lately said to you, Providence watches over all and guides the course of events."

The invalid, leaning her head upon the Marquise's shoulder wept tears of joy.

"Why do you weep?" said Mme. de Valbret.

"At our last meeting we promised to be friends henceforth. The dear bond which is going to unite us will only strengthen our affection."

"Ah! I weep because words are powerless to express my feelings."

Étienne regarded them in astonishment.

Turning towards him, Mme. de Valbret said: "The Marquis was named Geoffroy de Valbret;" and Étienne comprehended all, for the evening of the soirée, whilst waiting for Xavier de Bois Rougés, his grandmother had talked of nothing but the delightful visit of her unknown visitor, Mme. Geoffroy.

"Could it be possible," he murmured, "that the—"

"Yes," answered Mme. de Valbret, "it was not only a possibility but an actual fact. Little causes, great effects! You will often find this

the law, Monsieur, governing many of the events of life."

"One thought troubles us,—my son and myself," murmured the invalid.

"I think I know what it is. Do not let it worry you. So much the better for you that Renée is rich. You have sought the kingdom of God and his justice: accept whatever additional good may result to you therefrom."

Then pointing to the medallion, the Marquise added, "Let us not doubt that it is the friend to whom I so long ago gave that pledge of tenderness who now restores it to me. Watching over Renée from that home above, she has wished to entrust me with the secret, assuring the happiness of one so dear to us both. May we not in all confidence believe this?"

"What answer could I make you, Madame?" said Étienne. "I am indeed dazed, overcome. There certainly was never anything like this on earth."

"Yes, yes, my child," exclaimed the invalid, "there has been. Do you not recollect the story of Tobias? Afflicted and desolate, Tobias sent his son one day some distance from home to collect a little sum of money. And when the young man returned, he brought not only the few pieces of silver that had been owing, but the joy, the pride, the love of his life, Sarah. And to what was he

indebted for such a prodigy? Ah, the young man had met in his path the angel of the Lord."

"Oh! how can you draw such a comparison? I really decline my portion therein. However, since you have chosen it, let us pursue the subject to the end. What was the angel's answer to Tobias's warm, hearty outpouring of thanks?"

"It is scarcely worth while to go further," said the invalid smiling.

"Oh! yes, we must continue. I ask what was the angel's answer to Tobias? The angel told him that his (Tobias's) prayers and merits,—the merits of a life spent in the exercise of indefatigable charity to his fellow creatures and of every other virtue, had ascended on high, and because he was acceptable to the Lord, it had, been necessary for him to be tried by adversity. Thus has it been with yourself; but the day of your tribulation is now past, let your heart pour itself forth in thanksgiving."

Mme. de Valbret and the invalid talked a few moments longer; then, looking at the clock, Mme. de Valbret said:

"It is time for us to go, and fulfil our engagement."

"I am at your service; Madame," replied Étienne.

"Where is your mother's betrothal ring?"

"Here it is," answered the invalid, taking off

of her own finger a ring set with a small sapphire, "I should not have ventured to give it to him just yet."

"Oh! give it to him without the least fear. Good-bye, dear Madame. We must now leave you alone for a short time. To-morrow, M. Vangaramenghen will bring your daughter to see you."

"She will find her dear Cécile and Thérèse with me."

"They will be delighted at the news. Again, let me say good-bye. I will see you soon."

Mme. de Lagareuc's trembling hands clasped those of the Marquise once more, and then were laid on Étienne's forehead in token of her blessing upon the great event on the point of accomplishment.

"Go, my child," she said in a voice of emotion, "go and may God be with you!"

And these words were still on her lips, when she heard the carriage drive off, bearing the Marquise and Étienne to Renée.

* * * *

It was quite late in the day when Mme. de Valbret reached home. The servant who let her in said to her whilst endeavoring to make up a fire as quickly as possible:

"Mme. de Broz was here about two o'clock. She greatly regretted that you were not at home,

but she came in and charged me to tell you that she will breakfast with you to-morrow, if nothing prevents."

"I shall send her word that it will give me great pleasure to have her breakfast with me."

"M. de Bois Rougés has also been here twice. He is very anxious to see Madame, and he will be back about five o'clock."

"So much the better, for I had intended sending for him. Have you made a fire in the little parlor?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Now let Françoise know that I am home. It is already a quarter of five o'clock."

A few minutes later, the Marquise had put on a handsome wrapper; and, worn out with fatigue, she sought rest in the depths of an easy chair. On the previous evening, she had been devoured with anxiety, whilst endeavoring to bring together the ends of a perplexing question,—one of most serious import, since it involved the happiness of two young lives, the future of a family,—everything indeed, contained in that one word *marriage*, at the present day, so often considered synonymous with business, position, money. Now, she was rejoicing and thanking God for the mysterious means by which He had enabled her to accomplish her

purpose, to her own kind heart's satisfaction and the good of others.

Suddenly the sound of the door bell, interrupted her reflections. Old Pierre's hand raised the portière and Xavier de Bois Rougés entered.

"Madame, Madame!" he exclaimed, imprinting a kiss upon her hand.

"Ah! Madame!" he repeated, wiping his eyes, and for a moment unable to utter another word.

"Calm yourself, my child," said the Marquise. "Positively you are crying. Is it from joy or grief?"

"Madame, how can you ask me such a question?"

"Because I know that circumstances are calculated to produce a conflict of feelings in your heart."

"Oh! no, I assure you, no, although poor Alphonse is truly to be pitied. But I could not be indifferent to the voice of friendship in such a case as this, especially when the favors of fortune have been awarded one so truly deserving of them."

"You now understand why I was unwilling to have you present during that conversation with M. Le Mahouet."

"Oh! how I have congratulated myself that you asked me to retire. In what an embarrassing

position should I not have been placed ! I thank you indeed, Madame, for your thoughtful kindness on this occasion—it saved me a great deal.”

“Confess now that for the time you were a little vexed at me.”

“No, I cannot make such a confession, for it would not be the truth. To be sure, having no idea as to the import of the conversation, I naturally felt a desire to take part in it, purely out of my deep regard for Étienne, and judging from your words that they contained more than a vague hope. Still I felt that you had good reasons for requesting me to retire, or you would not have done so.”

“Just see now what an admirable thing confidence is !”

“When it is well placed,” replied Xavier.

“Oh ! of course, I mean when it is well placed,” said the Marquise laughing. “But, my dear child, how terribly worked up and nervous you are !”

“I really cannot help it. If you only knew what I went through with this morning between the ecstasies of the one, and the bitter regrets, the despair of the other, you would not wonder that my nerves are unstrung. It has so upset me that I have been necessitated to request of the ministry a respite of two days from work. My mother attended to this, for I really was unable

to worry with it myself. I must tell you, Madame, how delighted my mother is at the good news. She is coming to see you to-morrow."

"So much the better. I shall be very much pleased to see her. But now tell me something about our friend, M. Le Mahouet. How did he make known to you his good fortune?"

"At first he was unable to speak. When we got out in the street, he caught hold of my hand, which felt as if touched by a firebrand. Without saying a word, he dragged (if I may use the expression) me thus through the line of carriages before your door. 'What is the matter with you, Étienne?' I asked, 'you frighten me.'

"He made no reply, but when we were sufficiently removed from observation, he threw himself into my arms, exclaiming:

"'Oh! Xavier! Xavier!'

"I thought it useless to question him, any more, for he seemed too overcome with emotion to reply. At last, recovering himself, he said faintly:

"'I am going to marry Mlle. Vangaramenghen.'

"We were walking: at these words I stopped short.

"'What did you say?' I asked in a startled voice.

"'I am going to marry Mlle. Vangaramenghen.'

he replied ; this time speaking very distinctly. ' Dear Xavier, how happy I am ! '

" It was now my turn to be speechless. I cannot tell you, Madame, the confusion that for the next few moments had possession of my brain. Just imagine it ! During the whole evening, I had regarded her as the future wife of Alphonse, and the idea of such a marriage for my poor friend Le Mahouet never entered my thoughts, not even in dreams !

" ' I scarcely know whether I hear aright,' said I. ' Such happiness for you, Étienne . . . and for her ! '

" These last words, too, issued from my lips in accents of veritable joy. You did not know it, Madame, but yesterday whilst waiting for you, I saw this young girl weeping and praying before the tomb of the martyrs."

" She was imploring God to protect her, and her prayer, you see, has been answered.

" I understand it all now, but as you can well imagine, Madame, I did not at first, and I was truly perplexed at so many mysteries. Accompanying Étienne to his room, I learned from him all that he himself knew of this marvelous affair. He told me, too, that Mlle. Vangaramenghen was not unknown to him, as one of his sisters was devotedly attached to her—also that, last year, he had pleaded a case for M. Vangaramenghen,

which of course had made him acquainted with the distinguished banker."

"Yes," interrupted the Marquise, "and that is why I had no need to present M. Le Mahouet to his future father-in-law. The latter already knew and esteemed him. As soon as I mentioned the name of the young man whom I desired to become Réene's husband, M. Vangaramenghen exclaimed, 'Ah! yes, very good indeed,' and then mentioned the above incident which helped serve my plans."

"Étienne," continued Xavier, "told me how you gradually opened up to him this radiant perspective. I could not recover from my astonishment. That you were acquainted with Mlle. Vangaramenghen I knew, for I had met her on the stairway here. I also knew that you wished to save her from the marriage that her family sought to impose upon her, at which sentiments of yours, alas! I was not surprised, for with me affection is not blind. But suddenly to see Étienne Le Mahouet with whom you had no acquaintance whatever, of whose history even you were in complete ignorance a few hours previously, who was presented to you as a poor lawyer, asking your influence in obtaining a situation for him—to see him during the short space of a visit rise so high in your esteem as to be selected by you as a worthy husband for the rich and beau-

tiful Renée, was to me a phenomenon surpassing all comprehension! Étienne himself was puzzled to understand it; but he was so touched, so filled with joy, that he seemed almost indifferent as to the possible cause of such good fortune; preferring rather to regard the effect. I, however, seeking a clue to all this, remembered that when I gave you his address the name appeared to strike you as familiar, and I told him so. He replied, that being a lawyer his name was often before the public; and in this way it had reached your ears, but that positively he had never spoken to you, never seen you indeed before being received at your house."

The Marquise began to laugh. So did Xavier.

"Do you know, Madame, what opened my eyes to the truth? Well, let me tell you, it was the ray of light that broke in upon me from the accents of a bitter regret, which is the precursor of sincere repentance."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Marquise, "did he tell you all? He recognized me then?"

"When he had returned to his dwelling, with the sword in his heart—"

"Was it indeed in his heart?"

"It certainly was. The fatal words which destroyed his hopes contained a revelation. Scanning his memory for a solution of them, there suddenly flashed across his mind the recollection

of that eventful incident in which you were a participant. He was at our house as early as possible next morning. I was still in bed, let me confess to my shame, when aroused by his suddenly opening my door. Poor boy! he was pitiful to behold! I assure you, all his pretentious airs, his puerilities had disappeared. He was as pale as a sheet, and the picture of distress. This blow, terrible as it is, will no doubt prove a lasting benefit to him; it has already done him good. Even then I noticed in his language and his general bearing a simplicity, a manliness in which heretofore he had been very deficient. There was no necessity for my inquiring the cause of all this.

“I merely exclaimed,

“‘Oh! it is you Alphonse.’

“Bringing a chair up to my bed, he seated himself and said,

“‘Xavier is it true that Mlle. Vangaramenghen is to marry this M. Le Mahouet?’

“I replied,

“‘Alphonse, let me assure you that you doubtless were apprised of the fact, ere it was known to myself. I left Mme. de Valbret’s house under the impression that this young woman was to be your wife.’

“‘I believe you,’ said he, in a tone of great earnestness, ‘I believe you, Xavier. I know you

well, and I have confidence in you. Had it not been for the Baroness, I should never have spoken to you as I did last night.'

(He here made allusion to a little mistake on his part.)

" 'Think no more about it ; I have cast it out of my thoughts,' was my answer. 'You surely are not going to bring up that nonsense again.'

" He shook his head and said,

" 'Your dear friend has played a little game on you.'

" 'Not at all. Make no such accusations against Étienne whose conduct throughout the whole affair has been admirable in its delicacy. Mlle. Vangaramenghen's hand was offered him, instead of being granted at his request as you seem to think.'

" 'I did not deem myself guilty of any betrayal of confidence or even of imprudence in speaking thus, for no one would suppose that Étienne dreamed—'

" 'You did right,' said Mme. de Valbret.

Xavier continued,

" At these words, 'Mlle. Vangaramenghen's hand was offered him,' Alphonse made a gesture of despair that was indescribable. Then pressing his clinched hands to his forehead, he exclaimed,

" 'Yes, yes, it is true. I am not mistaken then.

This thought has been killing me all night. The Marquise de Valbret is truly revenged upon me. Vengeance is the pleasure of the gods, and, doubtless, also of the great ones of earth !'

"Madame, since yesterday morning, there had been nothing but a succession of surprises for me, and one more surprise added to the list ought to have been of no consequence. Yet, I hardly think that anything that had heretofore taken place in connection with this most mysterious affair could have made such an impression upon me as these words of Alphonse. Mme. de Valbret revenging herself upon Alphonse ! The bare possibility of such a thing ! It were easier for me to believe in a universal confusion of right and wrong.

"Asking myself if I had heard my cousin aright, I said to him,

" 'Alphonse, you are talking nonsense.'

" 'Oh ! no, I am not,' he replied, 'and moreover, I know what is the cause of all this.'

" 'Well, if you do know, please tell me, for I certainly could never guess what it is.'

"The astonishment and incredulity with which I received his prelude to the narration, calmed him somewhat after this first explosion.

" 'What would be the use of telling you ?' said he, shrugging his shoulders. 'You would

blame me, and that could not better my misfortune.'

"‘There is something then back of all this which I have never heard? Now, Alphonse, lay aside your anger, your suspicions and everything of the sort, long enough to tell what it is. You know my affection for you, my sincere desire to see you happy, and the frankness with which I have always treated you, even when our opinions differed. Now, be open with me; keep nothing back, and I, on my side, will tell you all that may be of any service to you regarding the persons and the circumstances—at least, all that I know.'

"Then Madame, he began to relate an incident, a deplorable incident—'

"Yes," replied the Marquise smiling, "I know what he told you. He said that anxious to gain a certain end—"

"To get to a concert in time."

"What it was matters not—and to attain this end he employed means somewhat reprehensible in their agility."

"‘Ah! would that I had broken a limb that morning;’" he said, continued Alphonse.

"Oh! the poor young man! He advocates violent remedies, I see. But it would be much better for him to govern and direct a faculty truly remarkable, then to lose it in so cruel a man-

ner! When he learns to practice respect for women, the aged, the poor, then indeed he may be agile in all security."

"Having finished his narration," continued Xavier, "he said these few words which are much to his credit: 'I did wrong.'"

"Ah! yes. To acknowledge a fault is nigh akin to reparation of it."

"He said repeatedly, as if seeking to vent his distress: 'My trifling fault did not merit such a punishment. I was indeed, on this occasion, as ill-bred as the man who repulsed me said; but not to such an extent as to merit losing the happiness of my whole life.'"

"And he covered me with imprecations, did he not, as a strange creature, a malevolent, implacable being?"

"Not knowing you, Madame, he did at first give way to some ill-feeling engendered by his suspicions."

"Poor young man! how mistaken he is!" sighed the Marquise.

"It is not necessary to tell me that, Madame. I know what your resentment means. It is because of their having injured you that the old gardeners, your neighbors formerly, are now so well lodged and cared for."

"Who told you that, Xavier?"

"Never mind, I know it. Now, to return to

my poor cousin—I was vainly endeavoring to reason with him, when he astonished me by saying,

“ ‘ Even here, this Le Mahouet had to be in my path.’ ”

“ What connection could Étienne have with this affair? ’ I asked.

“ Let me do Alphonse the justice to say that notwithstanding it redounded so greatly to Étienne’s credit, he told the whole story without the least prevarication. I now understood all that had seemed really inexplicable. Yesterday, on calling for Étienne to present him to you, Mme. Lagareuc, who had not yet retired, asked me if I were acquainted with a Mme. Geoffroy who lived in that neighborhood, a most charming lady who had just paid her a visit. She also told me some details of this visit, and I learned the drift of their two hours’ conversation, as well as the motive that had led Mme. Geoffroy to see her. In finishing his narration, Alphonse brought suddenly before my eyes the various personages of this truly remarkable story, and, in an instant, everything was clear to me.

“ I said to him, ‘ You have cleared up the mystery. I now see the cause of your aversion for Étienne.’ ”

“ ‘ At first, I felt afraid that he would tell you, and afterwards it mortified me to see him,’ he murmured.

“I draw my inferences from what you have just said!” I answered, “for Etienne never breathed it to me. You also enlightened me as to the cause of Mmè. de Valbret’s rejecting for her little friend the proposed alliance with you and seeking another. Her conduct in this was less a rejection of you, than the selection of a young man of whom everything and every one spoke favorably.”

“You are perfectly right, my child, you hit the point;” said the Marquise. “Your cousin did wrong, and his sufferings are less a chastisement than the natural consequences of his conduct, for it is certain that if he had not acted thus Renée would now be his betrothed. In the first place, his behavior on the occasion referred to was not calculated to give me a high opinion of him. There are acts unimportant in themselves which nevertheless reveal one’s character. Your cousin’s conduct was at variance with both kindness and good manners, the requirements of which he proved himself capable of ignoring, or at least of laying aside at option—a grave defect indeed, Xavier, when there is question of a woman’s happiness! We must know how to be heroic, if in the course of life the occasion offers; but ordinarily these occasions are rare; whilst our characteristics make the daily happiness or the martyrdom of those around us. That extreme elegance so sought after by M. de Mont-

pollin proves that he is far from indifferent to the opinions of others, even in the most unimportant matters. Now, do you think that a young man jealous of appearing in society as gentlemanly and polished to the highest degree, yet who could so easily lay aside the bare civilities of life when he believed himself removed from criticism, can inspire much confidence in his sincerity or his integrity? How many young girls bind their lives in matrimony to men of whose characters and dispositions they see only the bright side until too late to retrieve the mistake. And when at the domestic hearth the tinsel of mere worldly adornment gradually disappears, whilst the world still beholds a man of refinement and elegance the wife knows him as he is—devoid of both—sad knowledge indeed!”

“I should like to be able to contradict you, Madame, but I cannot, for you are right.”

“And how could I who had Renée’s confidence neglect a consideration of such things in a momentous question where everything should be examined? M. de Montpollin without intending it truly rendered your friend a great service. Just see the great effects resulting from what your cousin considered a very trifling, insignificant act! It gave M. Le Mahouet the opportunity of showing how different was his line of conduct, which in turn allowed me to penetrate into that

dwelling where I saw Renée's place marked out by the hand of Providence."

"This is what I told poor Alphonse, when he had made me understand that the person to whom Étienne gave his seat was no other than yourself, Madame."

"‘Let your astonishment cease,’ I said to him. ‘When I presented my friend to the Marquise de Valbret, I was under the impression that they had never met before, and he thought the same; but she already knew him, and his aged relative sufficiently well to feel justified in selecting him for Renée's husband.’"

"I am much pleased to tell you that the result was very gratifying indeed. When Alphonse had been made to understand that your decision was based, not upon the miserable promptings of resentment, but a most enlightened prudence joined to deep affection for Renée, his anger was appeased, and he grew reasonable."

"‘Are you sure then,’ he asked, ‘that Mme. de Valbret's choice of M. Le Mahouet was purely out of personal esteem for him, and not a desire to be revenged upon me?’"

"‘Certainly, I am; it could be from no other motive.’"

"‘Then why,’ he continued, ‘did she tell M. and Mlle. Vangaramenghen about it?’"

"Ah! Xavier," interrupted the Marquise, "be

so kind as to let him know that I did this very unwillingly, after vainly endeavoring to state my objections in general terms. I had no idea of entering into detail, but M. Vangaramenghen's questions were so pressing, so direct, and reticence on my part might have left him under the impression that your cousin's faults were of a graver nature than the incivility of which I had to complain; at least, there was nothing left for me but to relate the incident. M. Vangaramenghen was very indignant, and I had to do my best to mollify his wrath. It was just at this moment the proposal of alliance with M. Le Mahouet was accepted, Renée willingly acceding thereto, at my first words, and M. Vangaramenghen being not less favorable, although somewhat annoyed and undecided because of the hopes already given to your cousin."

"Madame," continued M. de Bois Rougés, "keep your words of consolation and encouragement for the unhappy culprit who, after grave reflection, begged me to ask your permission to let him come to you and apologize."

"He is approaching conversion!" exclaimed Mme. de Valbret. "Did this thought of apologizing emanate from him or you?"

"What matters that?" replied Xavier somewhat embarrassed at the Marquise's penetration. "It is more meritorious to comply with proffered

counsel in many instances than to take the initiative in the best of matters."

"My dear child, bring him here to-morrow. I do not wish him to humble himself before me. The mere fact of his coming will be sufficient. Assure him of my pleasure at knowing that he allows himself to be advised by a friend like you. It gives me great hope that this severe lesson will not be lost upon him. One day, his loss will be repaired. Renée would not have suited him; she is too far his superior in many ways, and she would have been very unhappy."

"Ah, this thought of her unhappiness made me sad."

"Without looking so high as was the proposed match with Renée, he can find a very suitable alliance. Opulence is not at all necessary. No doubt, this little episode will end in our seeing him happily married and settled in life."

A smile played around Mme. de Valbret's lips as she uttered this last sentence.

"I think so," said Xavier, with the same smile. The two looked at each other.

"Ah! Xavier you have stolen my idea."

"How could I help it, Madame? I felt so sorry for him."

"Does it meet with your mother's approval?"

"Entirely. The present happiness of Étienne and his betrothed have given poor Alphonse hope.

... He is a little brighter for this, and I think the hope will change into a reality. I have nothing whatever to do with the sentimental part of the affair."

"How he ought to love you!"

"I pitied him so. Moreover, Madame, I have not given him full rein in some matters. Whilst wishing to see Alphonse established, since he desires it, and knowing how beneficial good example under these especial circumstances may be to him, I do not intend him to waste what may be useful to others."

"Have you seen M. Le Mahouet since this morning?"

"Not yet; I am going to see him presently."

"He will tell you of M. Vangaramenghen's reception of us. Everything passed off very well. The marriage is to take place early in December. Now, Xavier, do you in turn give me a little information, not as to what has taken place but what is to take place. Tell me why it is that in seeking to assure Renée's happiness by a marriage worthy of her, I selected this young man who was a stranger to me instead of another whom I have known and loved since his infancy—one re-uniting in himself all the advantages of birth, fortune, virtue, intelligence, goodness of heart—in fact, everything that is desirable. He was near me, he had a mother who would have

cherished Renée, a sister the equal of Mlle. Le Mahouet. Although he denies it (circumstances never having given him an opportunity of proving it), I dare say that he is even superior to his friend Étienne. Why then, when it was in my power to give so great a proof of my esteem and confidence did I pass him by?"

"You praise him so highly, Madame, that he cannot recognize himself any longer."

The Marquise shook her head, and said, "I know what I say, and he knows of whom I speak. Answer me, Xavier. Why did I not select this young man?"

Looking at her with a smile of ineffable sweetness, he answered almost in a whisper, "Because this young man's heart was elsewhere, and you know it."

The Marquise clasped her hands.

"Ah! you could not conceal it from me," she said. "Have I not learned, day by day, moment by moment, to speak thus, how God forms the hearts of those whom He calls to Himself? Have I not reached the truth through that which makes it precious, inestimable—the struggle against self and the sacrifice of illusions? And what does your mother say, Xavier?"

"She believes I have a vocation, and little by little she tries to accustom herself to the

thought of my departure, she consents to give me to God, and yet—”

“And yet what?”

“With you I can speak openly. Doubtless, what she does is much; yet, in the presence of this supreme grace, I should like to behold in her something more.”

“Something more,” repeated the Marquise slowly. “Something more! Ah! they are all alike, dear Lord, those whom Thou dost select for Thine own! Listen to me, Xavier. Jean was sitting just where you are now, when I, at last, pronounced the words that separated him from me and gave him to Jesus Christ. He had been long waiting to hear them—these triumphant words. Often they had been upon my lips, but I lacked the courage to utter them. Oh! with what specious pretexts, what apparently forcible arguments did I not oppose my holy child, striving first to convince myself that I was right! But a very few words from his lips would suffice to show the fallacy of my utterances, and break down those barriers behind which I believed myself so securely intrenched. Oh! the wisdom with which God enlightens His own; and how blind are they who contend against them! Sometimes he vanquished me without uttering a word in reply. When anxious to keep him with me, I almost exhausted myself in

extolling the life of an honorable man in the world, the father of a family, the guardian of salutary traditions, the champion in society of truth and justice he would look at me and smile, and then the remainder of my words would die upon my lips. Before that angelic smile I must give way ; and I even found myself wishing that God's designs upon my son might never be anything less. Sometimes, thinking to touch the vulnerable spot in his heart, I would say :

“ ‘ Jean, with your great fortune, you could do so much good by remaining in the world.’

“ He would answer,

“ ‘ And is not one's self the most beautiful and acceptable alms that could be offered,’ or, ‘ Mother, it is not of me God asks much, but of you.’

“ At last, one evening (and oh ! Xavier, how often have I not thought of that moment, how often have I not thanked God for having aided me to triumph over self), he was seated just where you are, and the room lighted as it is now only by the faint rays of a taper. We were talking, I for the hundredth time urging upon him my vain desires, he combating them by his luminous, celestial hopes. Suddenly, I said to him,

“ ‘ Jean, my child, I see that it is impossible to dissuade you from this. I withhold my consent no longer. Go, and be happy.’

“At these words, a deadly pallor overspread his countenance, and, rising, he threw himself on his knees before me.

“‘Do you really give your consent, mother?’ he asked in a quivering voice.

“‘Yes, I give my consent, go and be happy.’

“‘Do not speak thus, mother;’ he replied, ‘you know well that it is not in search of happiness I leave you.’

“Almost distracted, I threw my arms around his neck, sobbing out, ‘Be happy.’

“‘He arose, and taking my hands in his, said in a tone which I can never forget, nor the prophetic accents :

“‘Happy ! I shall not be so alone. You also will be happy, not only in heaven, but even on earth.’

“‘I shall never be happy separated from you,’ I cried out in the bitterness of my soul. Pressed to my child’s heart I knew that his tears were mingled with mine.

“Two months later, there was no longer a Marquis de Valbret, his place in the bustling world was vacant, and an humble novice wearing a coarse, patched habit represented the last of that race. He laughed pleasantly as he showed me his habit. A feeling of bitterness swelled up in my heart at sight of him thus, and to conceal what I felt I embraced him, saying,

“‘I love you, my Jean, I bless you.’

“Fixing upon me one of those indescribable looks I had sometimes seen on his face, he said, ‘You love me, mother, you bless me. Yet, I desire something more.’

“He spoke just as you do, Xavier. You see that I felt then as your mother does now. At this moment the bell rang, and he must leave the parlor. Ere going, he said :

“‘This something, mother, may God give you ; I cannot.’

“Ah ! Xavier, this something more that my holy child desired I never understood until the day when I pressed my lips upon his forehead cold in death. He was sleeping with a smile, having sunk to rest in all the freedom of his sacrifice, the joy of his fidelity. Then and not until then did I feel what sorrow, what ceaseless remorse, I should have prepared for my portion in life henceforth had I by continued resistance to his vocation filled his last moments with regret and perhaps fright. My son, whose heart had been given to none other on earth save myself was not deceived in those hopes for me which he had longed to see realized : by one stroke, the hand of death, he had carried my desires afar. At his death-bed, where one felt far nearer heaven than the tomb, I understood how deep had been his tenderness for me, and also the meaning which

he attached to his words: 'You will be happy, even on earth.' He spoke truly, Xavier. I am happy. The sacrifice which for a long time seemed above my strength is now my support as I journey through life; it is the object of my dearest remembrance and my most cherished hope. I enjoy that peace, that assurance of the future in which all the sorrows that come upon me, and all the vain joys of earth (deceptions indeed), are swallowed up and lost. I am alone, it is true, but oh! for so short a time! Every day do I feel myself nearer and nearer the dear ones who have been awaiting me. The trials, the infirmities inherent to old age are my consolation, for they foretell the approach of the hour of recompense. I now possess that something more which Jean referred to—celestial peace and joy, and this blessing became mine just at the time when I believed I had received a cross almost too much for me to bear. Now I bless my child for his courage."

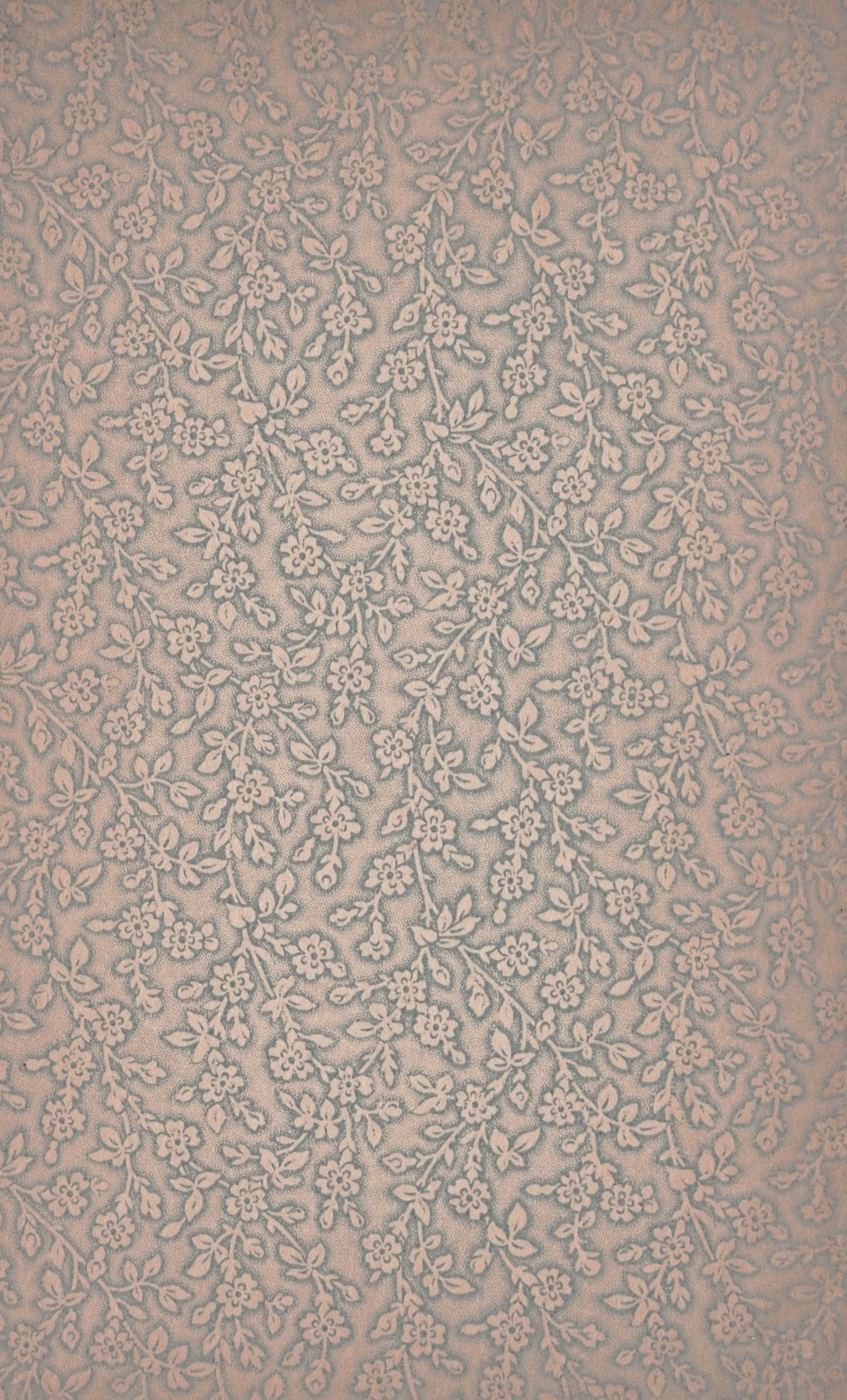
The Marquise ceased speaking, and looked up at the portrait of the young monk. Something of the heavenly expression of that innocent face seemed to be reflected upon her own countenance. Xavier sat mute and motionless before her, as if wrapped in meditation. He was struck at hearing her express so clearly and forcibly the thoughts and sentiments that abode in his heart. In a moment, she continued,

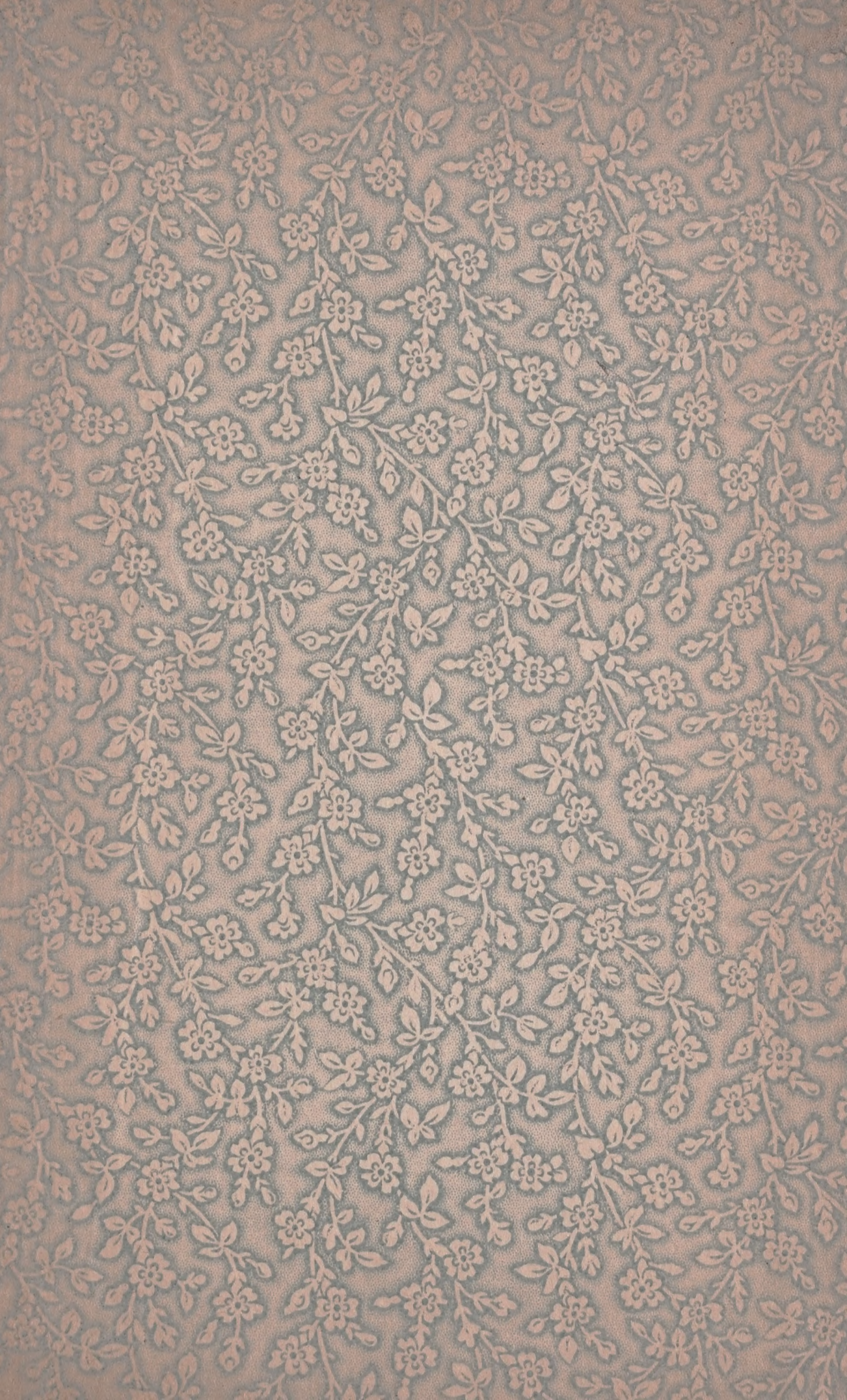
"Jean, you know, belonged to the Angelic Order. Are you going to be his brother, Xavier?"

"I am going to be a son of St. Ignatius."

"A Jesuit! You do well, my child. A Jesuit! in the hour of calumny and persecution to be ever foremost in the ranks battling for Christ, and to be for His sake a target for the keenest shafts! Come to see me whenever you can. We understand each other, we will be allies. I will often visit your mother. You will plead God's cause with her, I will plead her own. Will your words persuade her? I hope so. At any rate, I believe (indeed I cannot doubt it) that she will not refuse to profit by my experience."

THE END.





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